DOROTHY'S SCHOOLING

EVELYN RAYMOND

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"PLEASE, NEIGHBORS, ALLOW US TO PASS?"
Dorothy's Schooling.

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BY

EVELYN RAYMOND

Illustrations by S. Schneider

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THE DOROTHY BOOKS

By EVELYN RAYMOND

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DOROTHY'S SCHOOLING

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

No weather could have been more glorious than that autumn morning, no air clearer nor sunshine brighter, and the hearts of the young dwellers upon the beautiful mountain responded to the morning.

"The first day of school! With dear Mr. Seth Winters, the 'Learned Blacksmith,' for teacher, and for schoolroom that old smithy under the Great Balm Tree! Could anything be lovelier, more out-of-the-every-day than that?" cried Dorothy, fairly dancing about her little chamber at the farmhouse, as she made ready for this new experience.

So happy was she and so full of excitement that it seemed she would never be dressed; yet at last the pretty new frock which Mother Martha had made for this her adopted daughter was adjusted to satisfaction. Then with a girlish vanity she tied the great bow of scarlet ribbon in her dark curls and laughed again, recalling Father John's remark that it "made her look top-heavy."

Dorothy had but just arranged the bow at the correct angle when another girlish voice called up the stairway:

"Hurry, hurry, Dolly! If you don't, school'll be took in 'fore we get there!"

"All right! I'm coming, Alfaretta Babcock!" and with a final admiring glance into the tiny mirror and the pretty reflection she saw there, the little figure almost flew down the stairs and into the living-room, where her parents with her schoolmate awaited her.

"Heigho, my Cardinal bird! Feathers all primped and preened? That marvelous bow just right? Eh, sweetheart?" demanded Father John, teasingly, yet with a sparkle of pride in his eyes.

Such a gay, alert small maid this was, the "foundling" child of theirs, who had made the last twelve years of a childless pair one long, continual delight. "Dorothy," the "Gift of God." Doubly a "Gift" now that the father had become a cripple with many idle hours to pass; and though he answered gaily there was a keen regret in the ex-postman's heart for the long vacation ended and the constant companionship broken up.

Alfaretta, too, daughter of a neighboring cottager, was in fine fettle and, as Dorothy appeared, admiringly exclaimed:

"My! You do look nice! But Ma Babcock says your mother she does make your skirts too short. See mine? 'Most down to the tops of my shoes. See them shoes? Ain't they fine? Patent-leather tips and all. Come from Newburgh, them did. Ma said how what 'Liza Jane had in stawk wasn't no good, so she took the stage to town and fetched me these. Got any books?"

"No, Alfy. Mr. Winters said we needn't bring any. I reckon he'll just examine us, to-day, to find out how much we know then fix our studies for us. Seems queer to go to a school that isn't graded and where you don't know to what class you belong. Good by, father — mother! What a darling little lunch-basket! What? Did poor Peter Piper make it himself? The dear fellow!"

"Yes, Dorothy. Thank him and start on. See? All the other Babcock children are in line, and wherever will good Mr. Winters put such a crowd of youngsters!"

Even as she spoke the farmwife glanced with some anxiety toward the dull-witted lad who had been their "hired man" since that day when they had discovered him and the gold-mine in "South meadow" together and had offered him a home. His devotion to Dorothy and his close following of her had earned for him the nickname of her "Shadow," and she hoped he would not try to follow now. But the girl spoke a trifle sharply, for she also was tired of this too-constant attendance:

"You can't go with me this morning, Peter-boy. You must stay and wait on father. You're his left-hand, you know, as I'm his right. How would he manage with neither hand at all? Take good care of him, laddie, and don't let my kitten, Lady Rosalind, stray away."

The lad frowned and, for an instant, one of his rare but frightful rages seemed imminent. However the danger passed. Dorothy caught up the kitten and

placed it in his arms; then thrusting a spray of red geranium into his button-hole she added:

"There! 'That's for remembrance!' To remind you to weed well my father's rose-border. Don't leave a scrap of 'pussley' for me to find when I get back! Good by, good by, all!"

A moment later Dorothy and Alfaretta, followed by a trail of smaller Babcocks, were speeding down the leaf-strewn road leading to the farrier's shop beneath the Great Balm of Gilead Tree. Dolly was merrily humming the old college song about a "Balm-balm-balm-balm-Balm-of-Gilead" when they came to the cross-roads and there met the Smith Boys and Jim Barlow. The Smiths were sons of a farmer whose home was near to her own and Jim lived at Deerhurst with his new friend, Mrs. Betty Calvert.

He looked so neat and trim that Dolly could hardly believe he was the same "bound-out boy" who had helped her to escape from Mrs. Stott's truck-farm that time when she had been kidnapped by the farm-wife's unscrupulous son. To both of them, with the ready forgetfulness of their age, the past seemed like a dream and the happy present almost too good to be true. Indeed, Alfaretta expressed the general sentiment of the whole party when she exclaimed:

"My! Ain't it just fine to have our mounting all to ourselves! All the rich folks and 'ristocratics, that live here summers, cleared out; and no livery-teams nor carriges tearin' round and drivin' us off the road that's more our'n than 'tis their'n! Seems if 'twas sort of like a church under these trees, all red and

yeller and shiny-brown, don't it? But — my land! Look there — will you? Them's all the deestricters and 'pears like they was huntin' trouble!"

Dorothy and her party stopped short on the path. There was advancing toward them another group of children, big and little, with two half-grown youths as leaders. This couple wore an air of "dare" which Alfaretta promptly understood and explained. Secretly, she was frightened, but she allowed no fear to creep into her voice.

"That's one of my Nanarchist Pa Babcock's messes, sure as you live. I heard Ma arguin' with him 'at he'd better 'let well enough alone' and not go stirrin' up nothing. I know all about it. This is the first year the south-siders has had a schoolhouse of their own and they're scared of Seth Winterses' damagin' their school. Taxes is high and not many to pay 'em, and there's been a lot of trouble over that schoolhouse, first and last. Them boys is sent out to make us afraid to go to the blacksmith, who don't charge nothin' for his teachin'. Huh! Come on! Let's march right by and not notice 'em no more'n we would a polecat if we met one along the road."

Rumors of a coming conflict between the two new schools had already reached the Smith boys' ears, and John Jr., commonly called Littlejohn, nodded his head in approval of Alfaretta's remarks. Linking his arm in that of tall Jim Barlow, he marched valiantly forward, noisily kicking the crisp autumn leaves that lined the way and lustily whistling "Yankee Doodle." But his progress was cut short. The

south-siders ranged themselves in a row extending from side to side of the highway and with their own tightly linked arms presented a solid barrier to the opposing north-siders, as these dwellers upon the riverside flank of the mountain were termed. Between "north" and "south" there had long been a petty rivalry, such as is too common in country places.

"All the 'ristocratics live north side, and the reg'lar mountaineers, woodsmen and farmers, south. But, Friends and Brothers, fellow freemen, one man's as good as another — and a little better too, sir! In the sweat of your honest brows you have earned your schoolhouse and the right to educate your children as much or as little as you wish. I, Ichabod Babcock, am a south-sider of the most south-side, I, myself. I, Anarchist and Lecturer to the Downtrodden. But my folks, my wife and little ones, they've took up with rich folks, ex-postmen and mine-owners, and such. What if that top-lofty man, who's called the 'Learned Blacksmith,' does dare to open an opposition school to this we've labored so long to have built up here? Withstand him, Men and Fathers and Tax-payers! Don't let him take the bread of learning right out of the mouths of your offspring and throw it to the dogs. Withstand! and count upon ME and our upright Friend, Oliver Sands, to back you in the fight!"

This had been the oration of Pa Babcock at a school-meeting held in the new schoolhouse on the southern side of the mountain, the evening previous. It had been delivered at the behest of the miller, Oliver Sands, who "owned" him, as he "owned"

many of the audience, by reason of loans and mortgages upon their little properties. It followed that if Friend Sands opposed Seth Winters's teaching they also must oppose it, even though he was a man they liked and trusted. Therefore were their children incited to combat Seth's pupils and explained the presence of these "districters" on the road to the smithy, and the beginning of a famous school feud.

For a moment the two factions faced one another. Some grinned, others scowled, and the leaders prepared for a fight. But Dorothy stepped forward and courteously asked:

"Please, neighbors, allow us to pass?"

Astonishment held both ranks silent for an instant; then a derisive laugh sounded from the "districters" and Mike Martin retorted:

"Not by a long shot! There ain't room for but one school on this mountain and that's going to be right in our new schoolhouse. Teacher's waiting, fall into line, right-about-face, and save your skins! Hep, hep, hep!"

With that the insolent bully grinned ferociously upon this stranger girl who defied him and who received his answer with a contemptuous bow. Another instant she had dipped, thrust her head forward and darted beneath the linked arms of her opponents into the freedom of the road beyond.

Another instant and Alfaretta had followed her example and stood beside her; but when the younger Babcocks tried to do as their sister had done they came to grief. The linked arms came down upon them

like a trap and they were caught. There ensued a brisk contest of tangled legs and arms, shrieks and shouts, and finally a fierce battle.

Mike Martin grappled with Jim Barlow and Frazer Moore engaged Littlejohn Smith. The other lads entered upon a milder bout of fists and feet, while the girls of both parties stood aside, watched the fray, and sniffed at one another.

With most significant glances toward the bare legs and feet of Mike Martin's sister, Alfaretta ostentatiously displayed her own new shoes and airily flirted her plaid skirt.

Molly Martin reciprocated by nudging Jane Potter and remarking:

"Huh! Feels terrible sot up, don't she, in that old made-over dress of Mis' Satterlee's? We Martins don't have to wear no hand-me-downs, we don't, even if we do live south-side, 'mongst the real mounting folks."

"Umn," responded Jane, viciously. "Made so long she'll have to wear it a dozen years 'fore it's right size for a girl, any way. 'Sides that, Ma washes all Mis' Satterlee's lace curtains and I guess we could have left-overs, if we'd stoop to ask for 'em, like Mis' Babcock does."

Alas, and alas! Over the beauty of that glorious October morning had fallen the shame of human quarrels. Alfaretta's face flamed, as she now clasped the form of each little sister — escaped from the melée beyond — and the only reason she did not answer was because she couldn't find words sufficiently

cutting and contemptuous. Also, when at last she did open her lips to hurl a retort upon her enemies, she found them suddenly closed by Dorothy's fingers.

"Don't, Alfy, don't say a word — not a single word, *yet!* They don't mean it and I hate — I hate a quarrel! Yes, I know, I'm quick-tempered myself, you needn't remind me, but I won't say *mean* things, I will not. Nor shall you, if you're my Alfy and my chum. Now — now that Helena's gone;" she added in afterthought, which was none too flattering to Alfaretta.

However, in that happy-hearted girl there was no petty jealousy. Sufficient to her affectionate heart that she was the accepted friend of Dorothy than whom she believed no sweeter girl ever lived; and thus advised to silence on one subject she immediately began to count in a loud monotone:

"One — two — three — four — five — six —"

She was not allowed to reach the end of the ten counts which is reputed to conquer anger and, indeed, her anger had already departed at sight of a familiar figure which now came striding over the leaf-strewn way.

Seth Winters himself, with a merry song upon his lips but a glint of anger in his eyes. Forward he strode, into the very midst of the fighting lads, laying firm hands upon the shoulder of this one or that, and flinging each aside as easily as if some of them were not as tall as he.

"Well, now, my sons! Isn't this a pretty how-de-do? Always thought pupils went to the master, not

the master to his pupils! But the world advances — let's jog along with it. In this age of progress — suppose we begin the morning session with the recess? All in favor say 'Aye!' Contrary, 'No!' Good enough. I brought this sapling rod along to thrash the first fighter I came up with, for surely I heard sounds of warfare even so far as the Great Balm. Not a fighter left? Rod will serve just as well to thresh hickory trees, and last night's frost has set nuts popping, popping out of their burrs, almost like hail. What say, Alfaretta? Dorothy? And invite your girl friends, please, after you properly introduce me. I'm the nature-teacher, you know, and would much regret to break up a happy family party like this. More than that, I've just learned from a bird who told me that your new district-school, beyond the mountain-top, does not open until to-morrow. Fact, south-siders! So your — your call of this morning is a day premature. Shake hands all round and — let's go nutting!"

Was it magic? Was it eccentricity? Was it mere force of his own strong will? Whatever the cause, the result of the farrier's arrival on the scene was almost instant peace. The peace might be temporary — but for the time it was real, and the opposing forces of would-be-students followed this odd and kindly guide into the depths of that gorgeous forest where the nuts were popping, dropping, and that Nature which Seth loved was in her gayest mood.

Thus Dorothy's schooling began, at the heart of an ancient wood, with her first lesson out of a chestnut burr.

CHAPTER II

THE STORIES OF COMMON THINGS

A NUTTING frolic suited everybody, and for the time being peace was restored. Seth Winters was in a dozen places at once, it seemed to the south-siders, who knew him less than did Dorothy and the other north-siders. When Mike Martin and his chums fell into a discussion over this queer school which began with a recess and felt themselves unheard, the big smith suddenly rose from a near-by tangle of shrubs and quietly remarked:

"There's a time for everything under the sun. Frazer, what's the difference between a chustnut and a chinquapin?"

"Don't know, sir," answered the startled lad, with a jump, and wondering if Seth had heard himself described as "a crazy fool."

"Ask your teacher, to-morrow. I'd be pleased to tell you but I've no wish to interfere. And now it's time for lunch."

The boys stared, and Mike exclaimed:

"Why half the morning ain't gone yet!"

"True. But I'm hungry. Aren't you?"

"Sure. I always am," assented that lusty youth, with a grin.

Mr. Winters rose, stretched his mighty arms above his head, then folded them upon his breast and gazed about him. To these keen-eyed young folks he seemed like the lord of the forest and a feeling of shame for their own behavior toward him held them for the moment. It surely was a pity to fight such a kind-faced man, and why bother about his silly old school, anyway? One that began as this did with a recess would fail from its own sheer folly. Then, as Seth turned to summon Jim Barlow, Frazer whispered:

"Loony, he is. Bet you a cent everyone of his scholars come to our school 'fore a week's over. Folks send children to be learnt not played with."

"Bet you!" returned Mike, heartily.

"Take you and go you one better!" observed the man without turning his head. "Ho, hola! Jim! Jim Barlow!"

Jim came stumbling through the underbrush, a well-filled basket in his hand and paused to receive his commands. His blue eyes smiled upon his teacher and frowned upon the lads beside him.

"Go to the well under the Great Balm, laddie, will you, please? and fetch us a pail of water and the two tin cups you'll find there. Then get my microscope from my desk and that big botany off the top bookshelf. Wait, though, I reckon that's too big a load for one. Step along with Jim, Frazer, and help him."

"I don't need no help. I mean I don't need any," answered Jim, so promptly that the other lad sniffed resentfully.

"I wish him to go," said Seth Winters, quietly, and the lads set off. They walked far apart and in silence, each ready to do battle at the least provocation of the other. The smith observed them with a smile but with a real regret in his heart. He felt it a pity that so silly a feud should have been started and wondered if he had himself done right in offering to instruct his neighbors' children. At the time the offer was made it had seemed good and he had not dreamed of such an outcome as this.

Oliver Sands did not like him, who knew the miller for a cheat and hypocrite, and Pa Babcock was but a tool in the miller's hands. Besides that, Seth had often remonstrated with the would-be "Anarchist" for his foolishness in talking and lecturing upon a subject he did not understand, and nobody likes to be corrected — least of all a conceited person like Ichabod.

However, the affair was on, and Seth Winters was not the man to be turned from his purpose by opposition. So, though he was sorry there must be disagreements, he did not waver in his own plans; and now putting a little silver whistle to his lips, he blew a clear, sweet melody upon it.

The south-siders heard it in surprise, springing to their feet at whatever point they had been searching for the fallen nuts, but Seth's own pupils with an answering, glad "Halloo!" These knew that summons for their school "bell," and all came flocking to the master's side, wondering if real lessons were to begin.

"Roll call!" announced he, taking a tiny book from

his pocket and opening it to a list of names. "Respond in military fashion —'Here!' or 'Accounted for!' Alfaretta Babcock?"

"Here."

"Baretta Babcock?"

"Here, sir," proudly and distinctly.

"Claretta Babcock?"

Clary snickered, ducked her head, and hid her face from the curious glances of some south-siders; but Alfy promptly answered for her: "Accounted for!"

"Matthew Babcock?"

"He-e-ere!" stammered the owner of that name in a squeaking falsetto. His voice had "begun to change" and he was painfully aware of the fact.

"Mark Babcock?"

"Here. But can't be reg'lar, 'count of havin' hired out to do Bill Barry's chores."

"Luke Babcock?"

"Hail Columbia! Just hear it rain 'Babcocks,'" interrupted Mike Martin, with a loud laugh.

"John Babcock?" continued Mr. Winters, paying no attention to the interruption.

"Accounted for. Down with the mumps; Luke's on the road somewhere's, too, Mr. Teacher, 'less he's scared off by the deestricters," answered Alfaretta, self-constituted spokesman for her family.

"Spell it;" ordered "Teacher," and the girl stared. Then she comprehended, flashed a merry smile toward Dorothy and syllabled forth: . .

"D-i-s, dis, t-r-i-c-t, trict, e-r-s, ers, Districters; and I hadn't ought to called it 'dees'. Dolly's father

he told me better, hisself. Said a word had just as good a right to its name as I had to mine. I'm tryin' hard, I'm really tryin', but when a body's learnt things back-endwards first off seems if they never could get 'em headed straight, seems if," admitted this frank young person with another smile.

"I've great hopes of you, Alfaretta, I foresee you'll be my prize pupil. You've found the key to knowledge in recognizing your own ignorance."

Alfy colored and courtsied; then held up her hand and snapped her fingers, demanding fresh attention from the master; and when he nodded permission to speak, inquired:

"When's recess take in, sir? Ain't we going to have no book learnin'?"

"Presently. But yonder come the boys with the water and the glass. Please invite our guests to join us at lunch."

Everybody stared but Alfaretta did not speak. She was puzzled and dismayed. She knew that her mother had been "short-handed" in the matter of provisions, that morning, and luncheon for so many Babcocks was hard to provide. Why share that scanty allowance with a lot of south-siders, who had come to their side of the mountain expressly to pick a quarrel?

The blacksmith glanced from Alfy's now stubborn face to Dorothy's, which responded to his unspoken question with a smile.

"I don't know what mother put in my basket but I'd be pleased to have those girls share it with me.

Why not make it a picnic? Everybody put everything he or she has on that big smooth rock and chose somebody to divide it even all round. We can finish with some of these nuts, maybe. Molly Martin, if that's your name — Molly? Will you please call all your — your party to the rock?"

Poor Molly flushed and twisted herself awkwardly. She had never talked with such a girl as Dorothy, who looked so like the summer city people who drove past her on the roadside and yet this one seemed so friendly and — and folksy. She was already ashamed of herself and her rude remarks of an earlier hour, and she didn't see why her brother and his following didn't go home. She gave him an appealing look and, after a moment, he spoke:

"Much obliged, miss, but we didn't come for nobody's cold victuals. We come to settle this school business — and — and —"

"Oh! that's settled long ago," said Seth cheerily. "As for cold victuals, I propose to have some hot ones. Did any of you ever roast potatoes in the ashes? Eh? Ah! Mike Martin, I see you have. Then it's your part to show us how. I provided for just this feast. Mark, haul that sack from under the rock and see what's in it. Mike, here's a box of matches. Build a fire but be careful to set nothing else a-blaze. I would't have harm happen to this dear old forest for all the roast potatoes in the world!"

Everybody laughed. It was impossible to hold anger against this genial gentleman and oddest of schoolmasters. The south-siders again forgot their

supposed grievance, and their leader, Mike, flattered by an appeal to his skill, soon had the fire burning, the potatoes sorted and buried beneath it, and did all with the deftness of experience.

Seth watched him with real approbation and there was now no flattery in his remark:

"Why, lad alive, you do that fit to be a cook on a ship! Where'd you learn the trick?"

"Off choppin' with Dad and the men. He 'lows that good victuals makes folks do more, so he has a hot noonin' for his gang whenever he can. I can brew a dandy pot of coffee and make the nicest flapjacks! Can't I, Molly?" he demanded of his admiring sister and himself aglow with satisfaction.

"'Deed he can. Ma often makes him cook 'em for her when she's tired or workin' hard."

"Huh!" retorted Mike, with a scowl. To cook in camp was one thing, but to be introduced as a domestic drudge was quite another. Molly was abashed and looked ready to cry but, fortunately, at that moment, Jim and Frazer arrived on the spot and attention was diverted.

Of course, all were thirsty at the sight of water and after a drink for each, announced the master:

"Now, while the potatoes bake, let's make their real acquaintance, and find out how a really poisonous plant came to be adopted as a universal food. Incidentally, I'll finish my roll call."

He sat down with his back against the bole of a great chestnut tree and made several rapid entries in his tiny note-book. Afterward he picked up a po-

tato that had escaped the baking, carefully peeled it and laid the skin aside. All the young people watched him keenly, for he had the knack of making even his most trifling actions full of interest. Even the south-siders drew near and grouped themselves in an outer ring on the leaf-cushioned ground, with a long drought had left perfectly dry.

"The skin of this *Solanum Tuberosum,* uncooked, is poison. It's first cousin is the plant we find hereabout and call Deadly Nightshade. Many a youngster has come to grief, eating the purple fruit, or berries, of one or the other. Anybody got clear-starching to do? Well, lassies, here's your chance!"

Seth had been diligently grating the raw potato against a rough bit of stone and now held up the tin cup in which he had caught the mess. Already this was separated into two parts, the greater one of a watery fluid. The other part, he explained would presently resolve itself into crystals and the finest sort of starch.

"And my own old mother always made her starch just as I have shown you. I remember my first 'dicky' and the pride with which she polished it and I wore it. So, remember, young ladies, you needn't wear limp frocks so long as there's a potato in the bin."

Then he gave them a funny history of the *Solanum,* and how it had spread from its birthplace in South America all over the civilized world, a "greater conquerer of mankind than the most famous general ever lived."

"But I thought the vegetable was an Irishman! We always speak of 'Irish potatoes,'" remarked Dorothy, stirring the grated mess around and around with the tip of her finger.

"'Murphies' by adoption, my dear. And the Irish have good sense. They've made it their staple product and food. How are your faring, Mike, me bhoy?" demanded the master with a capital brogue and a roguish glance toward young Martin whose parents were Irish, though he had been born on this mountain.

Mike flushed but could not be angry with this good natured man whose smile was as kind as it was merry, and hastily probing the nest beneath the coals he drew forth a tuber by aid of a pointed stick, which he also thrust through its skin. A little rush of steam followed the withdrawal of the stick and upon being deftly "cracked" between two chestnut leaves, the potato showed a white and mealy heart.

"Done — to a turn! Pull the others out and toss a pile of nuts into their place. Humph! This is the nicest school I ever kept!"

They laughed, of course, since it was the first one, also, that this jolly grown-up had ever taught; and though Frazer Moore tried to appear contemptuous he did not well succeed. He knew in his heart, that he had already learned more that morning concerning a simple article of food than he had ever dreamed, and that thenceforth he would not often handle a potato without remembering its history and its qualities for good and ill.

"Little General Many-Eyes," Dorothy had named it; and it was she who now made herself mistress of ceremonies, catching the hot tubers in her leaf-protected palms as Mike laughingly tossed them to her, cracking them and re-tossing them to the waiting circle of outstretched hands.

"My kingdom for some salt!" cried the smith, when the jolly lunch began, and, instantly, with more than her usual readiness, Alfaretta held forth a paper packet.

"Here, 'tis! Ma put it in 'cause she said cold boiled eggs hadn't no flavor without it. Where — where's the 'kingdom', sir?" she ended, laughing, and now forgetful of her former caution, hospitably offering her basket of eggs and bread-and-butter to whoever would accept.

"So, also, are hot potatoes flavorless without that needed article. Anybody know where we get salt?"

There was no answer, and Seth Winters smiled.

"Odd, isn't it? That intelligent human beings should go blindly through life without even asking whence come the things they most commonly use and cannot do without. Well, I'm not going to lecture any more to-day. Dorothy, to-morrow, I shall expect you to bring me the story of salt. Written. And, Alfaretta, you're to find out what's inside an egg cooked and uncooked. You may search the Cyclopedia in my book-case and learn.

"Jamie boy, why does a chestnut have a thorny burr and a hickory nut a smooth one?"

Jim tossed back his head, in the way he had when

perplexed, and a frown contracted his brows. Then he answered:

"Can't even guess, Mr. Winters! But I'll find out before I'm a day older if — if I can!"

"Good and satisfactory. Oh! youngsters, how I envy you all! There is so much to learn, and to enjoy in the learning, and you've so many more years than I before you! But envy is a mean thing — and labor an honorable one. Here comes a horse to be shod, and for the rest of the day I must be a farrier instead of a pedagogue. School's dismissed!"

With a smiling good by this queer schoolmaster passed through the opening in the wood to where a man stood waiting, holding a restive horse by the halter; and in another moment they had turned toward the smithy under the Great Balm.

An awkward silence fell upon the young folks left behind. Then Alfaretta remembered the roasting chestnuts and proposed their enjoyment. But somehow, with the departure of the master, the temporary friendliness between the two groups of students had ebbed. Mike suddenly remembered why he had brought his party to this side of the mountain and the fact that, though he had suffered a brief diversion, he had been deputed to "break up" a rival school and that his task must be accomplished.

Springing up from the ground, he assumed a warlike attitude and addressing Littlejohn Smith, as his leading opponent, he declared:

"This kind of nonsense isn't here no more there. You kids may think it's mighty easy just to loaf

around to a blacksmith shop and hear fool-talk for a spell. But that isn't school-keepin'. Our up-mounting men have had a job to get a school and a teacher up here, anyway, and take the whole batch of us there ain't more'n enough to half-fill the new schoolhouse. Our schoolmaster's got to live. He isn't no rich crank like that Seth Winters who needn't work if he don't want to and has no right to take the bread of learning right out our mouths —"

Interrupted Alfaretta, contemptuously:

"Pooh! Shucks! That's my Pa Babcock's talk, his very own words. And when Ma asked him how folks could eat learnin', an' how a body'd go to work set a 'sponge' of bread-learnin' a-raise, 'cause she'd admire to make him a batch, he couldn't say a word. Just shut his eyes and pretended he was asleep. So there."

Mike waited for her to finish; then inquired in his most lordly manner: "Have you done?"

"For a few minutes," retorted Alfy, pertly.

"Well, we hain't. We've just begun. I give you fair warnin'. There ain't room for but one school on this mountain and that's ours. If you want to get a decent education you'll have to come to that. We're goin' to break up this business of Seth Winters's, and that's the settled fact. Our fathers and mothers are backin' us up in the job and there's more south-siders than north ones. Seth Winters is a crank and he's had his first and only day at teachin'." Then with a commanding nod to his comrades he led the way out of the forest, his faction humbly trailing at

his heels, and the surprised north-siders gazing after them with never a word to say.

Which was probably a good thing. Else some of them might have said things to be afterwards regretted. Jim busied himself in carefully covering or putting out the last bit of fire and, as a final precaution, turned over the ashes what water was still left in the great pail.

"Can't be too careful about a fire in the woods, this time of the year and the the ground chock full o' dead leaves. My! see that chipmonk! Mad as a March hare 'cause we've been stealin' his nuts. Ain't he the cutest creatur'? Master Seth said we might each choose what we liked best to study about and I choose woodsy things. But, my land! I promised Griselda Roemer 'at I'd step back, noon-time, and see to the stawk. Hans is laid up again with the rheumatiz."

Hans and Griselda Roemer were the old couple who lived in the lodge at the Deerhurst gate and with whom Jim stayed. There had been some question of his return to Baltimore and entrance at a public school there, but his entreaty to remain in the country near Seth Winters had prevailed with his mistress, Mrs. Calvert.

The longer the lad was in her service the better she liked him. His uncouthness annoyed her but his honesty and ambition delighted her. She had had many protégés in her time but not all had proved worthy of her benefactions. James Barlow seemed likely to do her credit and her sunshiny old heart re-

joiced in him — when he wasn't in sight. So she had accepted the lad's plea and the blacksmith's advice to leave him on the mountain, merely urging her "Cousin" Seth to "polish him up a bit, so that he won't seem just legs and arms when he enters a room," and had gone back to Bellvieu and her quiet winter there.

"James Barlow, I'm ashamed of you! You promised to talk better and you don't! There's no such word as 'rheumatiz', nor 'stawk', and as for 'creatur' you'd better put an 'e' at the end of it or — or — I'll know the reason why!" cried Dorothy, venting upon him her vexation over the renewed "fight."

Jim flushed. Her words were familiar enough, she was merely obeying his request for help in his education, but her tone was sharp and hurt his sensitive pride.

"All right. Good by. Don't fail to be on hand to-morrow morning. Seth Winter's school mustn't be broke up by no such ornery trash as them south-siders. It's a pity, it's a terrible pity! for that man hates quarreling worse 'n p'ison. To-morrow, nine o'clock sharp, at the shop under the Great Balm of Gilead tree."

Alas! when that hour arrived "school" was the last thing in anybody's thoughts.

CHAPTER III

FIRE IN THE WOODS

"FIRE! F-i-r-e! F-I-R-E!!"

There is no cry more terrifying to human nerves than this, breaking the stillness of a country night. Seth Winters heard it through his troubled dreams and roused to know that his foreboding of evil which had kept him wakeful was verified. Commonly, he slept as readily and soundly as a boy, but not that night. He had been dragged into a neighborhood quarrel and the end was not in sight. Now as he stepped from his bed a red glare shone upon his window and he realized that what he most dreaded had occurred.

"The woods are on fire! On fire, and dry as tinder!"

Then a second horror fell upon him. The calamity was of his own forcing!

"That little blaze on the rock, the picnic of roasted-potatoes which had been meant to quench a quarrel had caused this dreadful thing!" was the tormenting fear that now arose.

Yet, how could it? Jim Barlow had come to him in the afternoon, seeking information from his book-

shelves, and had assured him that he had carefully extinguished the last spark by a deluge of water. Not satisfied, even then, the farrier had gone himself at nightfall and anxiously inspected the rock and its surroundings, but his search had revealed no sign of danger.

A man came running by, hoarse with shouting; paused, looked in at the smithy, and screamed afresh:

"Fire, neighbor — the whole forest's afire! Bring axes, hatchets, ring a bell if you've got one and — make haste!"

It so happened that there was a big bell in the smithy. It had been brought to skillful Seth to have its clapper repaired and belonged to the town-hall of "lower village." It was a heavy burden but it could be heard much farther than a human voice and might rouse some still sleeping men to that battle with the flames.

Pausing long enough to fasten a stout leather belt around his body, Seth thrust therein an axe and a hatchet, then seizing the bell in both hands started for the fire. Oh! but it was cruel, cruel! Those lusty flames encircling his beloved trees which had taken centuries to grow, some of them, and now stood helpless and doomed before this oncoming death! A mad fury possessed the heart of this ardent nature lover, and gave strength to his arms to swing and toll that bell as he could never otherwise have done.

It was this ominous knell which aroused Dorothy from sleep and sent her in terror to the window. But from thence nothing could be seen save the peace-

ful garden and its ordinary outlines. Only, for a moment, it seemed to her she saw a dim figure flit through the bushes and disappear behind the barn. However, she wasn't sure of this: and, as the bell clanged again and louder, she ran to her parents' room for company.

"O mother! What is it? Why is that dreadful bell ringing? Sounds as if some awful thing had happened, a massacre of —"

"Hush!" warned the other, slipping her own trembling arm about her daughter. "Listen! There's somebody coming along the road, calling — hark what he says!"

It was John Smith with his sons behind him; all armed with axes and branches of cedar from the roadside trees, and pausing outside the gateway merely long enough to explain:

"The mountain's a-fire! A lot of property's in danger. The bell's to summon every able-bodied man to fight the flames, so I guess, but who is ringing it or where it came from I don't know. Reckon the trouble is too far off to damage you any and — Come on, boys! No time to tarry!"

Away they sped and, rather because they knew they could not sleep again than that they dreamed of being any help, the three startled people at the cottage made haste to dress and sat down by the front windows to watch.

"I know where that bell came from and who is ringing it — though it's stopped now. I saw it in Mr. Winters's shop. He was to mend it and it looked so

heavy — how can he carry it and ring it? But it's he, I know," said Dorothy, shivering. "He'll be frantic over this, too. If there's anything he loves it's a tree: and we had a fire — I told you, remember."

Forest fires are not uncommon, but these three city people had never witnessed one. In town, they had been accustomed to the clanging of fire engines through the streets and if such were heard at night, they merely turned over in their beds and went to sleep again. There was no alarm for them.

But here, with no water at hand, what would the puny strength of a few men avail against the terrible element let loose amid a wilderness of timber? Even father John shivered at the thought and bitterly felt his own helplessness in that hour when everyone was needed.

Presently, too, the sky grew rosy with the reflected flames and showed that the fire was increasing. The wind had risen and blew the smoke in their direction and Mother Martha's careful soul bethought her of danger to them and their belongings.

"If it should come so far as this edge of the woods, across the road, we're apt to be caught, I think, John, that I'd better get that tin box of papers, about the mine and such things, and have it right at hand. No harm to be prepared against the worst;" said the wife, rising.

"O mother! Don't! It makes it seem so terribly near to hear you talk like that! Surely we shan't be burned out! Oh! no harm must come to our precious

home!" protested Dorothy, clinging close to her father's arm.

"You're right, Martha: and, by the way, better get that sealed letter or document of Mrs. Calvert's from wherever you keep it," advised her husband, with equal caution.

"Mrs. Calvert's letter! Oh! I had utterly forgotten that! I haven't thought of it since the day she sent it and I put it away! But I'll get it right soon. It may be even more important than our own papers," answered the house mistress and hurried away.

The tin box was easily secured and, lighting a candle, she climbed the tiny inner stairway toward that small attic in a curious corner of which she had bestowed the letter. A corner that was rather a small triangular space behind the panel of a chimney-cupboard. She had discovered the secret nook while cleaning the cupboard early on her arrival at the farm, by jarring down the little board which covered the nook. It had instantly suggested itself to her as a capital hiding place for any treasure and she had promptly put it to use for Mrs. Calvert's benefit. She did not believe that anybody else knew of the secret nook and would never have dreamed of its existence herself, save from the accident to the facing-board. This fitted so securely into place that she had now much trouble to pry it out, ruining several hairpins — her only tools at hand — before she succeeded in doing so. Then she put forth her hand to grasp the big envelope and found only emptiness.

"What does this mean? Nobody knows of this

corner except myself and I certainly did hide that letter here! Can it have slipped down into some crack?"

Yet even the slender point of the prying hairpin revealed no crack. There was only the solid masonry of the chimney, whose size seemed out of proportion to that of the house itself, and had been wrought by the energetic hands of its late owner, Simon Waterman. Another specimen of "Waterman's Folly," the neighbors had pronounced it even while admitting it to be an excellent piece of work.

"Oh! dear! this is dreadful! John would rather lose every paper of our own than that one of Mrs. Betty's! He'll never forgive me, if I can't find it — and where else shall I look? I did put it here, I must have. I remember it so well."

Indifferent now to the fire in the woods, Mother Martha dropped down on the floor and carefully recalled every incident of that day when she had been entrusted with the document.

"It was that very morning after Dorothy came home to the farm after being kidnapped from our home in Baltimore. We were all so happy over it. Mrs. Calvert sent Jim Barlow, the boy who'd helped my Dolly escape from Mrs. Stott's truck-farm and was now hired to work for Mrs. Betty — sent him with a basket of fruit and stuff and the letter. The same time the dogs got loose and made so much trouble. Alfaretta Babcock and her sisters had come — My heart! She stared at that letter as if she could read through the envelope what was inside! Could she

have followed me and — and could she have taken it?"

It was a mean suspicion and dismissed almost as soon as it arose; yet, like all suspicion, it left its taint behind it. However, even the lost document was forgotten for the time being as voices from below stairs summoned Martha down.

"Mother! Mother come! Here's Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Babcock wanting you to help!"

"Coming, Dolly!" returned the worried woman, hastily rising and replacing the board she had pried from her "nook," then lifting the candle and going below.

There she found two greatly excited women, each with kettles and baskets galore, and each out-talking the other in her eagerness to explain:

"Whenever the woods is a-fire, we women set right to work to make coffee and fix sandwiches and any kind of victuals to feed the fire-fighters. Your house is nigher 'n ours so we've come to do the b'ilin' and spreadin' here," explained Mrs. Babcock who was already lighting a fire in the cook stove, and moving about the kitchen as naturally as if it were her own.

"You're the right kind of a housekeeper, neighbor. 'A place for everything and everything in its place,' so 't a couple of strange women can step right in and go to work without hindering to hunt things. Always lay your fire over-night, so?" commented Mrs. Smith, pouring coffee berries into the mill and beginning to grind away as if her life depended on it.

The house mistress laughed and felt flattered. "Yes, I do, though John teases me about being too

forehanded, sometimes. Says if I could I'd get breakfast the night before and have folks up to eat it before they went to bed. But seems to me if you don't look ahead a little, you're always in a muddle. Milk? Why sure. But last night's already 'set' to rise the cream and might as well have fresh. 'Most time to milk, anyway, though it isn't daylight yet. I'll call Peter. Queer that he hasn't waked long before, hearing the shouts outside."

"I'll call him, mother!" volunteered Dorothy, no longer afraid now that these bustling, active visitors were in the house. Then she ran out of doors to the barn, in a finished loft of which the lad had his comfortable bed. They had tried giving him a little chamber in the cottage itself but his habit of wandering by night and his restlessness had disturbed them till they fitted up this loft for his use. Here the dull-witted lad had seemed happier and had given them no trouble; Mrs. Chester's only anxiety being that he would secure the matches she had forbidden him and set the barn ablaze.

Peter Piper had resented this precaution. All his lonely, wandering life he had been accustomed to making a brushwood fire whenever and wherever he chose, and he knew how to start a blaze even without matches, though he had a propensity to fill his pockets with these from any place where he could find them. So that his mistress's command had no affect, beyond the robbing of her own match-safes.

However, no harm had yet ensued, and her anxiety had become less. Now, as Dorothy disappeared barn-

wards, she busied herself piling cups into a basket and adding a dipper with which to serve the coffee to the men. Mrs. Smith had brought her own great boiler, used only for picnics or "bees," and was already brewing a quantity of drink that simply amazed the cripple watching.

Mrs. Babcock was cutting up the bread she had brought, slicing Mrs. Smith's ham and Martha's cold roast, and turning out sandwiches at a rate that was equally amazing and made John cry out:

"Seems as if you must have been in the restaurant business, neighbor! I thought Martha was quick, but you — Why, it's a flash of the knife, a dab at the butter, a slap of the slices — and the thing is done!"

"Ought to know how. Used to work in a railroad eating-house, 'fore I was married. Gen'rally folks pick me out to do this kind of thing when we have Sunday school picnics or any sort of public doin's. Have a sandwich, sir? Plenty to spare one and makes a body feel queer in their insides, a-gettin' up sudden so, in the middle of the night," returned the busy woman, cheerfully.

"How strange it seems, for all of us to be so excited and — and sort of glad! Of course, not really glad — nor really sorry, either," said Dorothy, coming back from the barn and reporting that Peter was not there. "Doesn't look as if his bed had been slept in, either, not since you made it up with fresh sheets yesterday morning, mother."

"Indeed? Then I must go and milk Hannah, myself;" she answered. "I suppose he's had one of his

restless nights and has wandered off. Quite often he sleeps on the floor, you know. Seems to feel it more natural. Besides, he was angry, yesterday, because he couldn't go to school with you. Probably, he's off in the woods with the men now, and he can be a deal of help if he wishes."

With that the lady departed barnwards; and after a short delay was back with her brimming pail of milk, and describing the astonishment of Hannah at being disturbed in the middle of the night for such a purpose.

The great kettles of coffee were "trimmed" with milk and sugar, ready for drinking, and the cup that was handed the farmer he declared to be delicious. Then the women and Dorothy, each laden with a basket or pail, started for the scene of the fire, leaving Father John to doze in his easy chair till their return.

Dorothy never forgot that night, or early morning in the woods. Approaching as near the conflagration as they dared, Mrs. Smith and Ma Babcock joined their voices in a loud "Halloo!" which, after a time, the men heard above the roar of the flames and the cracking of falling branches. John Smith came forward to get the refreshments and Dorothy felt that she would not have known him had she met him elsewhere, so smoke-blackened and stained he was. The boys who followed him, to distribute the food, were equally soiled and their father proudly explained:

"Lads have worked like regular heroes, both of 'em. And we're getting ahead, we're getting ahead.

Seth Winters seems possessed of the strength of a dozen arms, chopping off branches, beating out every bit of flame he sees starting in a new spot, and acts as if he had eyes all sides of his head — he discovers so much that we overlook."

"Are there many of you fighting the fire? Can we go a little further into the woods?" asked Mrs. Smith, without pausing in her handling of sandwiches and coffee.

"Well, you might go a speck further, around that side the wind don't blow. But watch out for sparks. Women's duds 'd catch easy, and don't want *folks* burnin' well as *woods*. Many? Yes; and more comin' all the time. That bell was the grandest thing! Seems as if it must have been sent up-hill a-purpose. Folks can hear it all over the valley, and soon as they'd look out of window they'd see the blaze and hurry to help."

"It sounded just — just awful!" cried Dorothy, with a little shiver, remembering its first, startling tones, and slipping her arm under her mother's. "And — Hark! It's ringing again! What can that mean?"

They were all silent, for an instant, likewise wondering; then exclaiming: "That means fresh trouble of some sort!" Mr. Smith darted into the forest again, the lads promptly following.

There were but two strokes of the bell, this time, the last one ending in a sort of crash, and succeeded by absolute silence, save for the subdued roaring of the distant flames.

"Somethin's happened! Somethin' terrible!" cried Ma Babcock, at last. "Never is a forest fire but some poor wretch gets hurted! Limbs fallin', men choppin' reckless, only bound to stop the flames spreadin', tree-trunks burnt half-through and fallin' undermined like — I'll go see. You folks stay here and serve out, if so be anybody comes to be fed."

For some reason, other than fear of the fire, she moved away from the others very quietly and gently, as if even in that open wilderness she dared make no noise. But she had not far to go before she was halted by sight of a group of men coming toward her. They were sharply silhouetted against the red background of fire, and they moved slowly forward into the dim light of the now dawning day. They bore something between them, a sort of litter of pine boughs, and on the litter, faintly discernible, lay the body of a man.

In absolute silence, as if struck dumb by some great catastrophe and now rendered indifferent to the fire behind them, the four men came to the open space where the women and Dorothy hovered in fear, and rested a moment from their labor.

"What — what —" gasped Mrs. Smith, sympathy choking her voice.

"Seth. Poor Seth! A tree fell where he was working alone. I think — May we take him to your house, neighbor? It's nearer than the smithy."

"Oh! how dreadful, how dreadful!" cried Dorothy, and sped homeward to prepare her father.

CHAPTER IV

WHO STARTED THE FIRE?

THE blacksmith was not dead, though at first all feared he was. As Mrs. Babcock had surmised, the charred trunk of a tree had given way before his too vigorous axe-blows, and had crushed him in its fall. Nobody had been near enough to see the accident except James Barlow, who had caught up the near-by bell, given it the two strokes that summoned aid, tossed it aside, and set to work, single-handed, to rescue the victim.

It was a dolorous procession that came up the path from the gateway, rousing Father John from the doze into which he had sunk, while Dorothy flung herself into his arms, sobbing:

"He's killed! That splendid man is killed!"

He did not answer. He could not, shocked by her words and this visitation of almost silent men, who spoke in whispers, and with difficulty made their way through the narrow doorway with their burden, to lay it upon his own roomy lounge.

"Will you not take him up-stairs? It's nicer there," said Mother Martha, to the men, in a low tone.

But Mr. Smith objected, saying it was best to disturb the injured body as little as possible till the doctors came, for whom fleet messengers had already been despatched. Their advice should be acted upon whatever that might be; and he added, with a hopefulness he did not wholly feel:

"I 'low he may be only stunned. Likely he'll come to, after a spell, he's such a healthy, strong old fellow."

"Just it! Just exactly it. He's old, and old bones are slow to heal and old folks can't stand no shocks!" returned Mrs. Babcock, shaking her head, despairingly.

Then the doctors came, three of them, from both "upper" and "lower" villages, and Father John led the frightened Dorothy out of the room to that quiet upper chamber where so many of his own hours were spent.

To them there soon came Mother Martha, a woman transformed by this event from a rather querulous house-mistress into a calm, self-possessed, and most capable nurse. It was her hands, rather than those of the other, more experienced women, which supplied the surgeons with whatever they needed, almost without demand from them, and after that first instant of alarm, it was her hopefulness which supported the others back into cheerfulness.

"Mr. Winters isn't dead. He had begun to revive even before the doctors came. His ribs are broken and one arm, and there's something wrong with his

ankle. But he'll live, he'll get well, and I am so glad. My! What a night this has been!"

As soon as they had heard the physicians' verdict, the fire-fighters returned to their now almost accomplished task of putting out the flames, and the two farm wives went with them to serve the coffee which, though now cold, was still necessary for the weary men.

Peter Piper had reappeared, acting very subdued and almost terrified, and hovering about the injured blacksmith in a manner pitiful to see. He cried like a little child, wrung his great hands, and shivered as if he, too, had been in peril of his life.

It was upon him that the reviving farrier first fixed his attention and it was the poor half-wit who suggested the plan to be carried out.

"Want to turn nurse to the old man, Peter, lad? Want to come to the shop and take care of me while I'm getting well?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Then, doctors, take me home. Our neighbor, here, will lend us his wheel-chair, that can be opened as flat as any stretcher."

"Better stay where you are, Seth. You couldn't have better nursing than this good woman will give; and in bachelor's quarters —" urged one.

"My bachelor quarters are as handy as any could be. Mrs. Martha has her hands full enough, as it is. There's not much farm work to be done now, this fall, and she can spare Peter to me, I hope. I'd better

make the change right away, while things are fresh and my strength unwasted. See to it, please."

They did not greatly oppose him. They knew he would be happier in his own comfortable little home than in that of any, even the most hospitable stranger, and much of his recovery depended upon his own contentment.

So, as their own time was precious, the physicians decided to take him to the smithy without delay; Martha accompanying the party to see him made comfortable, Peter assisting in the pushing of the wheel chair, and Dorothy remaining at home to prepare breakfast for her father.

So began the "second day of school," and again a deputation came from the south-side to prevent its opening. These had, of course, heard of the fire and — since their own hamlet was safely removed from danger — had rather rejoiced at it. They were quick to tell how Seth Winters had proposed the fire on the rock the day before, and with many an "I told you so!" imputed the loss of property to him.

But they were not inhuman lads and lassies, and when they learned of his accident, they were honestly regretful. Also, it seemed very terrible that his rival school should be broken up in just this manner, and after a visit to his shop, where there was nobody now to fight, they retreated to the new south-side schoolhouse, and to the lessons provided after an orthodox fashion.

"Served him right!" said Friend Oliver Sands,

riding up to that same freshly-painted building and hearing the news. "When a man sets out to oppose the regular law and order of things he ought to be punished. Did thee hear, Dominie Wilmot, whose land the fire was on?"

"No. I didn't ask. Want to hear the first class in reading, miller? I'm just going to begin, but we're rather short of books. They say there's a new set of readers published now, and it might be best —"

"Not a bit, not a bit! The books that their fathers and mothers used are good enough for their children. Thee mustn't encourage extravagance, Job Wilmot, or thee'll lose thy place."

"Not extravagance, miller, but — Course, there have been changes since their fathers went to school. The old geographies I used thirty years ago, you see — New states and territories — New —"

"Tut, tut, tut! I want nothing 'new' in this school beyond this new building, it's cost so much to build. Keep to the old ways, the old landmarks. New geographies, pooh! Teach the young folks the three R's and how to look out for Number One and thee'll have done thy full duty, Job Wilmot, and don't thee forget it. As for branching out into new paths, teaching about birds and beasts and a child's own insides — Faugh! Leave that to such foolish men as Seth Winters who has reaped his own reward already. Gid-dap, George Fox!"

The fine gray horse, who rejoiced in this time-honored name, sprang lightly forward and the miller dis-

appeared from view. The first class in reading toed the mark and began the sing-song repetition of the printed words. They used dilapidated books, with many pages missing, and cared not at all for the meaning of the words they pronounced. They had not wanted such a teacher as Mr. Wilmot, and were already mutinying against the state of things. They felt their only way to rid themselves of him and his antiquated notions was to torment him into resigning. With this in mind, Mike Martin suddenly lifted his hand, cracked his fingers, and demanded:

"Teacher, what's the difference between a chestnut and a chinquapin?"

Those who had heard that same question propounded on the day before at the "school of the woods" laughed aloud, while the other scholars stared; and the poor old master flushed crimson at what might either be intended as an insult or a real desire for information. He knew nothing of modern "nature-work" and chinquapins are not indigenous to that locality.

After a moment he rallied and answered bravely, "I'll let you know, to-morrow, at a more fitting time to answer."

"After you've had time to look it up in somebody's books, you mean! Well, you needn't trouble. I can do that for myself. I'll ask the 'Learned Blacksmith' to show me the right one, after school. He knows more, sick a-bed, than some folks well:" retorted Mike, insolently, but without receiving further reply.

"Read your paragraph, Frazer Moore," commanded the master.

"Huh! I'd be glad to, but it's tore out my book. I say it's a shame we can't have new ones. I'll tell my father 't, if I can't, I shan't come to school. Big boy as I am, learnin' his A-B-C's, so to speak. I'll run away and hire out, first;" said Frazer, who really wished to learn and felt "as if I'd been told to put my brains into a straight-jacket," so he expressed himself.

Poor Dominie Wilmot sighed, remembering other earlier schools in which his stern voice was the only one presuming to be heard, where no pupil dared question the master's information. It would have been to his advantage had he frankly admitted his own lack of knowledge, for these teasing lads would then have respected his honesty.

So, unfortunately, both mountain schools began; south-side with contempt and restrictions — north-side with the master stricken and disabled; and the prospects for Dorothy's schooling were dark, indeed.

Leaving the new schoolhouse, Oliver Sands drove swiftly to the smithy under the Great Balm. In his suave and politic manner he expressed profound sympathy for Seth Winters and suggested that he be removed to a hospital somewhere.

For which advice the stricken farrier thanked him while he declined it. Next, to the visitor's eager inquiry as to the extent of the fire and whose property was damaged, he answered, promptly:

"Nobody's except my own and a corner of Mrs. Calvert's. Yours is on the other side the mountain, fortunately."

The miller did not look as if he felt this so fortunate. He had long wanted an excuse to "prosecute" the blacksmith,—"persecute" might be the better word — who had often advised the mountaineers how to keep free from debt to Oliver, had even lent them money without interest, at times. Where the farrier's money came from, the miller could not guess, because that eccentric man was reputed to "have gone through his property like a fire through stubble." As for Mrs. Calvert lending it — he didn't believe a word of that story. Betty Calvert was a close-fisted woman, as he had found her in every deal — so he claimed.

"Indeed? Then thee is fortunate in punishing only thyself. But, Seth, at thy age, thee should know better than to build a fire in any woods, especially after such a drought as we have had."

Poor Seth was at the end of his strength and his patience. Martha had gone home, the doctors had arranged him on his own bed, as comfortably as might be and had, also, departed. There was nobody near to care for him except Peter Piper, who had disappeared the instant the miller reined up "George Fox" before the smithy door.

"Peter! Peter, lad! Come here!" called the injured man, impatiently.

No Peter responded and Oliver smiled grimly.

"Thee should go to a hospital, neighbor Seth. It's the only fit place for an old man like thee, with no wife nor child to care for thee."

"And you should go home. Pardon my bluntness, but I'm tired. The boy will come back as soon as you leave, and — some of my pupils will be coming along to see how I fare. There is really nothing you can do for me."

Oliver slowly rose and twisted his hands over one another in that unctuous manner which so annoyed Mr. Winters. "Yes, thee should have known better than to light a blaze in such a dangerous spot, an old man like thee."

"Oliver Sands, hear me. That blaze was not started by any brushwood fire of mine."

The voice was now so firm and assertive that the other man stared. "Thee is wandering in thy wits, friend Seth. It is time, indeed, that I left thee to recover. But, of course, it was thy fire, none other. The fact is so patent that everyone must believe it, nor will it win thee favor with thy neighbors."

"Wait! Here comes one who will bear me out in what I say! Wait, and take care, yourself, Oliver Sands. Well, Jamie lad, tell this kind gentleman, please, just where last night's fire was."

Jim Barlow entered at that moment and without any hesitation described the location and area of the conflagration.

"And where was it that we had our picnic?"

"On Sampson's Rock t'other side the woods."

"Is the tract between them burned or not?"

Jim's eyes wandered between the two faces before him but he answered as firmly as before:

"Not a mite. There ain't no more connection 'twixt them two spots than there is between this mountain and the one across the river. I told you that, Mr. Winters, last night afore you was hurt and I say it again now. I've just been over all the land between, and poked in the ashes of our little fire and there ain't a sign of its being fresh. You needn't to worry another minute over that, and you mustn't. Whoever set the woods afire, last night, *you* didn't and couldn't have, 'cause your little one was plumb out and water-soaked long 'fore dark."

"Thank you, James. I know that; but I like to hear my own knowledge verified. It makes this lying here like a log somewhat easier to bear. Going, Mr. Sands? Good-by. It was by no carelessness of mine that I lost my beloved trees and endangered others' property. But — it was by somebody's fault, and I shall make it my chief business to find out whose. When I do, depend upon it, excuses will not shelter him!"

This nature-lover had roused to an undue fit of passion. The memory of those blazing oaks and chestnuts, which seemed to extend their mighty limbs as if they were appealing arms seeking protection from the monster which destroyed them, came before his mind again and again, refusing to be banished. Almost they seemed to him to have been endowed with hu-

man life, and only one comfort was his: They had not perished by his fault.

"That's a queer sort of man, that Quaker miller. I've seen Quakers afore and liked 'em. But him — he gives me the creeps, seems if. Now, Mr. Winters, you go to sleep. There ain't nobody else in sight. I'll sit right here by the doorway and keep folks off. You shan't be bothered by nobody. That's the worst of havin' so many friends as you've got! They'll all be so sorry for you they won't give you a chance to get well. I never saw a man had so many folks like him!" cried Jim, proudly.

"Yet there's nobody without enemies, my lad, and that good man who has just left us is my bitterest one. Why — Well, I hardly know myself; except that I've tried to prevent his injuring some ignorant, helpless people. No matter. Let him pass; and if you can be spared from your own work I shall be glad, indeed, to have you stay here awhile. Peter has run away somewhere. He doesn't like the miller any better than I do, and he seems greatly to fear him — which I do not. Oh! my beloved trees! I wish I could forget their charred and ruined forms!"

For this regret even James could not comfort his beloved friend so he wisely said nothing. He merely closed the door to that inner room where the blacksmith lay, and, securing a book that might enlighten him "why a chestnut should have a thorny burr and a hickory nut a smooth one," sat down by the smithy door to read. He did not get much chance for this,

however, because, as he had said, one after another of the farrier's man friends came to inquire for his welfare and to offer any assistance he needed.

This was all politely declined, save in the case of a rough, dissipated looking man, whose voice Seth heard through the closed door and whom he demanded to see.

Ushered into the tiny bedroom, that yet was so spotlessly neat and orderly, the man fidgetted and fussed till the sick man asked:

"Do you really mean that you'd be glad to lend-a-hand in my trouble, Owen Bryan?"

Bryan shifted his weight to the other foot, cast a sharp glance toward the questioner, dropped his gaze again, and answered:

"I do mean it. I'd — I'd call it a fresh chance if you'd try me. I ain't half so worthless as folks say, but when a man's down on his luck everybody gives him a kick. I never took that money, they said I did, out the postmaster's till, and they couldn't prove it when they tried me. But — I *have* been tried, I've been '*cused* of stealin', and I might as well have stole, after all, and got the good of the missin' money, sence bein' proved innocent don't rub off the stain of the arrest."

The poor fellow's tone was bitter and Seth protested, sharply:

"Stop that, Owney Bryan! The stain you mention is only on the outside of you now, like that smut on your coat; but if you'd really stolen the cash it would

have been on your soul and honor and nothing could have washed it out. You're the best man to shoe a horse that I know in this town, better even than I am, and I'd like to have you step right into the forge now, take off your coat, roll up your sleeves, and go to work. I give you full charge of that part of my business till I tell you different. I need an assistant, because I've just turned schoolmaster, and I'd like to have my time free.

"Hark! I hear a team stopping at the shop now. Go out and see what's wanted and tell whoever it is that you're the 'boss' now. Oxen, by the sound; so must be somebody from beyond the mountain who doesn't know I'm laid up."

It was good to see how the discouraged, shambling man straightened himself, and with what an air of brisk activity he began to pull off his ragged coat, as Seth Winters's confidence in him restored his self-respect.

"So that's settled, Jamie boy! and do your best to give the chap a lift. Tell anybody you meet who's been accustomed to my labor, that I've a man in charge who's a better workman than I am. There'll be no stoppage of business at the little shop under the Great Balm, just because I didn't know enough to keep from under a falling tree."

So the household at the smithy resolved itself into a permanent company of three; at which some would-be-wise-men scoffed; because a half-witted youth was chief nurse and cook, and a disreputable loafer and

probable thief was farrier in charge. Yet despite all prophesies to the contrary this odd household thrived and prospered. Those who believed that Seth's "living" depended upon their patronage sought to continue it, by one trial at least, and found their horses so well shod, their wheels so satisfactorily tired, that they came again and thought no more of changing blacksmiths.

Neither could broken ribs and an arm long keep Seth Winters lying on his bed. He directed his helpers how to concoct a stout leather brace for his body which he declared was far better than the bandages and splints of the surgeons; and with his arm in a sling he moved about the premises, "a man again."

Also, his gayety and courage were even greater than before; and he confided to Jim Barlow, his trusted companion:

"There's never an ill than doesn't bring good. Odd, that, isn't is? Always true and always a surprise. If that fire hadn't 'happened' Owen Bryan would never have come to me to hire out. He was on the downhill road, traveling pretty fast if reports are true, propelled to his own destruction by the burden of suspicion laid upon his bent shoulders. He came — just in time. I shan't lose sight of him again, and though he thinks it's only temporary I know that the Balm of Gilead shop has found a new master.

"Then, poor Peter Piper. There's something amiss with that lad. He acts frightened all the time, and his protruding eyes watch me so close they often give

me the 'creeps,' as you call it. He's in trouble of some sort. I'm glad to have him here till I find out what's wrong. My poor trees — I can't think of them without sorrow; yet — if by their destruction Owen's manhood and soul were saved — better a dead tree than a ruined human being."

"You do beat all for finding out the bright spots in things, Mr. Winters, and I'm tryin' to do it, too; but there's one other thing I'm plumb set to find out and that's — *Who set the woods a-fire?* Comes over me times and again. Hello, Peter Piper! What's the matter with *you?* What makes you cut and run every time we say 'woods' I'd like to know? Did you get so scared that night, though you were off sky-larkin' otherwheres and nobody saw you round, that you don't like to hear about the fire? You do act queerer 'n ever, and you've never been kinder treated, not even to the farm.

"By the way, Mr. Winters. Here comes its mistress now, down the road with a basket on her arm and a bucket of somethin' good in her hand. Never see such good hearted folks as all these neighbor women be! If you don't get fat and sassy, livin' on the top of the land, so, 'twon't be the fault of Mis' Babcock an' Mis' Smith an' Mis' Martha's. Mornin', ma'am. Comin' loaded, just as always. Walk right in. Mr. Winters he's right smart this mornin', an' 'll be tickled to see you. Goin' to begin school again, to-morrow, sure."

The tired woman yielded her burdens to the out-

stretched hands of Jim Barlow and smiled, saying:

"How good and Baltimorish it does sound to hear that 'right smart!' And I'm glad Mr. Winters is better. I hope quite well enough to help me out of a little worry of my own.

"Why, Peter? Why are you peeping through a crack that way? and why do you look so afraid? Haven't a grudge against your old mistress have you? Come and get this bucket of soup and heat a part of it for your patient, right now."

But if the half-wit heard he did not obey. After one more furtive glance at the visitor he disappeared entirely and it was many hours before he returned.

Jim also went away leaving the mistress of the mountain farm to seek advice in the perplexity that tormented her, and which she had not as yet confided to any other. But she found no comfort in the words that greeted her statement:

"Mr. Winters, I've lost that document Mrs. Calvert entrusted to me, that was marked 'Important. Not to be opened till after my death.' I hid it safely, as I supposed, but I cannot find it anywhere. Do you suppose it was, really, so 'Important'?"

"Far, far more so than you can imagine. *And my good woman, that document must be found.*"

CHAPTER V

A CHAPTER OF "IFS"

DESPITE the fire which had destroyed so many trees, there was still a most abundant crop of nuts, that autumn; and, as the best-bearing chestnuts and walnuts were on northside, these woods were full of boys and girls from both schools, each afternoon after school closed and the day was fine.

To Dorothy this was a new delight. Saving pennies to buy a pint at some market-stall had hitherto been her experience; but to gather them by the basket, and even bushel — she could not get used to that marvel, and was always exclaiming over it. Cried she, once:

"O Alfy! Does seem too wonderful to be true! Just pick nuts off the ground this way! I wish every poor little boy and girl in Baltimore was here this minute to share them with us!"

"Huh! I don't! Huh! Wouldn't be one a-piece, I reckon, then. More'n that, them old south-siders hasn't no right to come over mounting and steal ours, anyway. Ma Babcock says to drive 'em off if we can. Why, Dorothy, Ma herself likes to come get 'em. She's sold bushels of 'em, years back, to Newburgh stores and took it out in trade. Makes her mad as a

hatter to have the deestricters tresspassin' on our side.

Dorothy sat down and laughed. Besides her were two baskets heaped with hickory nuts in their outer shells, which would diminish in quantity when their husks fell and they were properly dried, but which would still be more than one household could eat during the winter. Or so it seemed to the city-reared girl. But the more calculating Alfaretta looked greedily at the store, even enviously toward those which her friend had gathered.

"Alfy, dear, I do believe you're a miser! Never have enough of anything but always longing for more. And you do worry me dreadfully, you're so careless in your grammar. Dear Mr. Seth looks as wrinkled as a baked apple, sometimes, when you're talking. You *know* better; then why don't you talk better? As for the nuts, why I've a lot at home already and you may have these."

"Don't want 'em — them, I mean. Wouldn't touch to take a single one. You belong and they belong. It's only the deestricters — district scholars, I mean, that haven't any right our side the mountain."

Dorothy lolled back on the mossy ground, clasped her hands behind her head, and gazed through the bare branches into the blue sky. It was a mild day of Indian summer and to the imaginative girl the scene and the time were wondrously beautiful. She began to dream dreams and to draw pictures in the light clouds floating overhead, and to relate her visions to her matter-of-fact friend.

"Alfy, do you know what I see? I see you, up there, a grown-up woman, very handsome, very clever, teaching school! You've often said you would 'like to school-keep' sometime, and you will. You can learn your lessons quick-as-a-wink, when you want to, so's to go nutting or to the village, or anything like that. Queer lessons, too, aren't they, the most of them? I think Mr. Seth's school room under the Great Balm tree is the most delightfullest place — that doesn't sound right, my own grammar has caught a limp, but it says just what I mean. Sometimes when he takes out his old violin and lets me try to play it seems if I'm too happy to live. I'm going to be a musician, see if I'm not! That's pictured in the clouds, too, if — *if* — that wretched, troublesome mine would only turn out right. When it was discovered everybody thought we were going to be rich — as the Montaignes, maybe. But, being mine-owners doesn't appear to be such a fine thing after all. Father has to write and write letters, all the time; and men come and talk iron-ore and mineral-water till I'm sick of the sound."

"Huh! That's just what Ma Babcock said. How 't 'Waterman's Folly' would likely fool you folks just as it had fooled old Simon. She says there is iron in this mounting but not enough to pay for all the machinery and things and hiring men to work the machines. Pa Babcock says if they'd asked his advice he could ha' showed 'em how to mine so's to make the ore they dug out pay for the cost of diggin' it.

But they wouldn't listen to Pa, and Ma says it's because he's cried 'Bear' so often that when there is a real bear nobody won't listen."

"Whatever do you mean, Alfy Babcock? Are there bears on this mountain?" demanded Dorothy, suddenly sitting up and gazing about her.

"Pooh! Aren't you a silly! Didn't never hear the story 'bout the man who liked to get up fusses and kept cryin' 'Bear's comin'!' half his time, just to see the folks scatter and run? Then when one day a real bear did come and he cried they wouldn't believe him and just left him to be et up all by himself. Served him right, too."

"I don't believe you've got that story just right, Alfy dear. Let's ask Mr. Seth about it."

"All right. Just as lief. But Ma says that for once Pa knows what he's talkin' about. He's always lived right here on this mounting, ever since he was a little tacker and his folks moved here; and he's forever pokin' around in the dirt. He claims he's a splendid — splendid Ge-o-geo-some kind of a man —"

"Geologist?" suggested Dorothy.

"Likely. Don't matter. He thinks so, anyway, and Ma says Pa really does know more about dirt and stones and boulders than he does about earnin' a livin' for his family. So, if things ain't goin' to suit your pa, I wish for once he'd took some stawk in mine."

"I wish so, too, if he could have helped us out. Everything was so beautifully arranged, we thought

the money would just come rolling in. But it hasn't. Almost every bit that has rolled anywhere has been claimed by 'the parties of the second part,' as those gentlemen call themselves, to use in 'developing' the mine. As for the mineral-water — Alfaretta Babcock, will you believe me when I say the doctor firm who've got that in hand have spent thousands — thousands — of dollars just to advertise it, and not a bit of profit yet!"

Alfaretta stared, open-mouthed, incredulous.

"Huh! Who'd dast to ask them so much? I don't believe it!"

"I didn't myself, at first. Not till Father John showed me bills figured out so carefully, and told me how high the rates are for a single page of a great newspaper. Father says that they call this an 'investment,' to make their product known, and expect to get back in sales a deal more than they expend. That's business; and I — I'm beginning to really hate the business, it gives father and mother so much trouble and disappointment."

"And *I* hate that mineral-water, though I don't care a continental about business. I've tasted it more'n once. Always made me sicker'n a dog. I've drinked it sometimes, when we've been berryin' 'round Mineral Spring and I was so thirsty I couldn't help it. Always sorry afterwards. Ma says it makes her think of a nest of eggs a hen sot on for full three weeks and then just broke without hatchin'. Ma don't see how any mortal in their level senses could

think of pourin' such stuff into their insides, when the Lord's made plenty of fresh spring-water for 'em to drink without any of that sulphur, or iron, or other mis'able stinky stuff in it."

Dorothy sighed, but admitted:

"Alfy dear, I guess — I guess your mother's a pretty smart woman. Mr. Seth says she has most excellent natural abilities, and I know she does say things that sort of hit the centre of a body's thoughts pretty sure. Mother Martha and I don't — don't feel very happy over that going-to-be-famous bottled water. You see, in the beginning, the gentlemen said we would be able to 'realize' on that before we could on the iron ore. That it would be so easy, so very easy, to 'put it on the market.' So we two went to work and planned just everything we'd do. How we'd have our cottage remodelled and furnished; how father should have a fine greenhouse and capable gardener; how mother should keep 'a carriage and pair,' with a coachman in livery to drive for her. I planned his livery. It was to be bottle green with black facings, and we'd hunt for the cutest little footman to sit up behind, like the rich folks in Baltimore have. But — Oh! dear! The 'carriage and pair' are still wallowing in the depths of that deceitful 'spring,' mother Martha hasn't a single new silk gown, I haven't had my precious violin lessons, father has had nothing but head-work and letter-writing, and — and — I wish we'd never heard of the mine nor the spring and then we should have been far happier."

"'Blessed be nothing,'" quoted Alfaretta, sententiously; then suddenly lifted her hand, imposing silence.

Dorothy also listened. At first in amazement, then in keen delight. From somewhere in the distance came the sound of a violin playing — oh! such wonderful music! Even she who had attended many concerts in her old city home had heard nothing like this. She began to tremble. She could scarcely breathe, lest she should lose one single note of that pure melody. Even the leaping of a squirrel among the branches overhead seemed a profanation of those entrancing sounds.

Alfaretta, too, was stirred from her usual phlegmatic calm into a wondering curiosity; and as the music ceased she whispered:

"Is it 'fairies'? Molly Martin says them *be!* she's seen 'em! Do you s'pose so?"

"No. There are no such creatures, else I, too, would call that fairy music. It comes from the Great Balm direction and I'm going to see who's playing!"

"But Dorothy, Dorothy! You've forgot your nuts! Somebody'll come and hook 'em, sure! And I can't carry both baskets! I — can — not!"

Dorothy didn't even turn her head as she answered:

"Bother the nuts! I say you can have them and I reckon you'll always find a way to take care of your own!"

If there was any sarcasm in this speech it fell harmlessly from Alfaretta's sturdy shoulders. Better to

her, at any time, was a salable possession than the more spiritual matters which appealed to Dorothy.

Breathless and eager she came to the smithy and to the group outside it. There sat Seth Winters in his rustic chair, his cane by his side — for the twisted ligaments of his ankle had made him permanently lame — and on the frame of the grindstone just within the shop sat Dominie Wilmot, the out-of-date schoolmaster of south-side.

They two and no other. Upon the farrier's face an expression of perfect content and upon the master's one of exaltation.

At Dorothy's hasty approach, Seth looked up and said:

"You, lassie? What's sent you flying away from your mates and nut-gathering? Alone?"

The girl clasped her hands and gazed from one to the other, all her passionate love of music shining from her eyes, but still wondering to see these two sitting so friendly together, and the violin lying on Mr. Wilmot's thin knees.

"Oh! sir! Who was playing? Who — who?"

Dominie Wilmot brought his faded eyes down from the clouds, where they had been fixed, and stared at the girl. Then at a nod from the farrier, thrust the instrument under his chin, drew the bow across the strings, and again struck into a melody so beautiful that it seemed almost more than Dorothy could bear.

Seth Winters opened his "good arm" and drew her to his side; and once more uplifted above the troubles

of his sordid, petty life, the old musician carried his listeners with him into a beautiful, better world. Till, after a time, he laid down the violin and dropped his head on his breast, lost in thought.

Then said Dorothy, eagerly:

"Oh! sir, where did you learn to play like that?"

"You like it, child? Well, I don't think I ever learned, that is, studied, as most players do. It came to me, was born in me, I reckon. I haven't what teachers call much 'technique,' but only enough to conquer some difficulties. I — I haven't had a violin in my hands for years till lately, when this good neighbor let me use his. It was his own playing that I heard down the road which drew me here in the first place."

Seth Winters laughed and his eyes twinkled as he patted Dorothy's hand resting upon his knee.

"This little maid knows how poor a musician I am, though I love music. She and I together manage to squeak out some sort of a tune from this old instrument which is, I believe, far too fine for amateurs to handle. It belonged to my father — and to his father before him. I have a fancy that it holds the melodies of ages, and that none but a *mæstro* can draw them thence. Such, lassie, is our good Dominie here; and I reckon this is the first time you've met the south-side teacher. Mr. Wilmot, one of my own pupils, Dorothy, commonly called Dolly, or Dorothy C."

Dolly rose and made her most profound courtesy. She could not keep her eyes from the long, thin hands which had drawn such wonderful harmony from the

old Cremona nor from envying the gift of this shabby, gray-haired man. Then she cried:

"Why do you give up music just to teach a country school, Mr. Wilmot? A master like you?"

Seth would have checked her too personal question but it was not resented and the musician answered, sadly:

"Necessity has no option. I've been a poor man all my life, and had sick people dependent on me. I got into teaching school and I've never been able to stop. That is, when I could get a school to teach. I never owned such an instrument as this and the one I did have had to go the way of my other belongings, at a time when all employment failed."

"But surely your music would have paid you better than anything else. Concert folks, or orchestras — why, I never heard anyone play as you do! I'd give all the world if I could do it!"

There was silence for a moment, the Dominie soberly shaking his head, and finally answering:

"Sounds easy, but it wasn't to be. I dared never give up a small certainty for a possible gain — yet more probable loss. No, no. 'Where the goat is tethered there it must browse.' I've laid by enough, by hard saving, to put my invalid wife and myself into some Old People's Home when — when the time comes that we must go. Meanwhile, we jog along, we jog along. And this man, here, why meeting him and having this chance at his Cremona — why he's put the breath of life into me. 'An ill wind blows nobody

good.' The insolence of some of my pupils sent me along this road to see for myself what sort of pedagogue he was who taught children out of his head instead of out of books. Then I heard him trying to play, holding his fiddle with his lame arm and — and not succeeding so well. Not but what he may do finely, other times.

"So I took it out of hand — I couldn't help it and showed him how. Afterward we talked; and I bless the hour which set me on the way to see and despise the rival schoolmaster and blacksmith by trade. Miss Dorothy, you are a lucky girl."

If miller Sands, Pa Babcock, or any other familiar, had heard Mr. Wilmot thus discourse, they would hardly have believed their own ears. Instead of the halting speech, the timid, shrinking manner, was this fluency, this self-composure, this positive happiness. So great is the power of sympathy and appreciation to unlock the eloquence of a human heart.

Again the old man lifted the violin and this time the familiar strains of "Home, Sweet Home" floated out upon the balmy air. The tune, so simple and so moving, sent the quick tears to Dorothy's eyes and roused a host of tender memories in old Seth Winters's breast. When the melody again ceased, they all sat silent till the girl began, impetuously yet half-timidly:

"Do you — would you — could you give me lessons? If my folks would let me take them, and if I could get hold of a violin to practice on, and if — if — could you — would you?"

"What a lot of 'Ifs' in the road!" exclaimed the farrier, though almost as closely as Dorothy watching the effect of her halting question upon the Dominie.

"I'd like it. If—" said the old man, with almost as much hesitation; "if you've a knack for it."

"Show him, Dolly!"

"I'm afraid! Yet, I'd have to, if he would and they would, course."

Mr. Wilmot handed her the violin and she took it with a new reverence, although she had always felt it an exceeding privilege to touch the old Cremona. She had had a few lessons in Baltimore, at a time when her adopted parents fancied she possessed a "gift" and because Father John himself was almost as fond of music as of flowers. When she had been almost as anxious to be an *artiste* as she was to play and frolic.

But like others of her earlier ambitions this musical one had yielded to the charms of Mabel Bruce's croquet set and roller skates, and had failed before the drudgery of practice. During her brief city life, Dorothy had "never had time" for anything save fun and the few household duties mother Martha required of her. Now, in the simpler life at the farm, hearing Seth's attempts on the violin, the ambition returned with double force.

At a nod of encouragement from Dominie Wilmot, she took the instrument, rested it upon her shoulder, and drew the bow across the chords. The result was fairly good, and seeing a look of interest upon the old

musician's face she took courage and inspiration from it.

They were the simplest of melodies, of course; refrains of well known Scotch songs, such as she often sang in her clear, untrained voice for the pleasure of her Father John. Now and then came a squeak or discord, at which she flushed and the old *mæstro* winced; but, on the whole, she acquitted herself fairly well; so that her listeners felt she had sufficient talent to be encouraged.

Then she gave the violin back to its owner and stood with fast beating heart, awaiting the verdict upon her many questioning "ifs."

The answer began with another "if," at which they all laughed. Said Job Wilmot, once more hesitant and perplexed:

"If the trustees don't object, and I could get the time from nursing my poor wife, and we had a violin to practice on, and your folks could — could pay just a little — I'd be glad of the chance. And if you think I'm technical enough."

"Hold, man alive! Not another "if," and you like me! Dolly and I are straightforward people — that's why we're such good friends. Rest easy about the price of lessons and the instrument to use. Not this, of course. It's too precious for regular fiddling on, even by a light-fingered little maid. As for time, I should think that Dorothy could go to your cottage on the south-side, every Saturday, and if she needs more lessons than that, once during the week after

school closes. Unless it would disturb your wife to have her come."

"No-o. I think it wouldn't but — but the trustees —"

"Hang the trustees!" cried the farrier, with unexpected wrath. "Not literally, of course, though it's a punishment none too severe, seems to me, for some of them. Or it could be arranged when you come across to have a peck at my book-shelves, now and then, as you've been doing lately and as I like to have you do. Somehow it can be arranged, don't doubt it. Run home, at once, Dorothy dear, and lay the proposition before your parents. Tell them, please, that there'll be no difficulty about either payment for lessons or the purchase of the fiddle. The same little wallet that held the price of Friend Sands's mortgage has enough left in it for all your present educational needs. Skip away and learn if we may go on with the matter or if they object. *My* 'if' this time, you see! We'll wait for you here."

But though the two instructors sat in the smithy till the dusk fell, and Alfaretta Babcock had found a slow, laborious way out of the woods with both baskets, Dorothy did not return.

Alfy managed by carrying each basket a little way ahead, then setting it down and returning for the other, to take that a few steps further still.

"Sort of laps and slaps, I call it, like that kind of embroidery stitch Dolly's ma showed me, slidin' one thread back for every two forward. Never mind,

walnuts is walnuts; and Dorothy is a punkin to give 'em away after she's got 'em picked. Not for all the music ever played, by fairies even. Wonder why she didn't come back! Wonder — My heart! Who's that creeping through the bushes yonder? Looks like Peter Piper and if 'tis him it's the first time he's been seen sence the blacksmith was first hurted. Acts as if he was lookin' out for trouble or afraid of somethin'. I wonder — Ma says she sometimes thinks that poor creatur' 'd ought to be in the poorhouse, or somewheres; not let to run loose, so, 'cause he's nigh crazy, Ma says." But being herself a brave young person, possessed of an intense curiosity, she left her baskets to wait while she set out in pursuit, calling at the top of her voice: "Peter! Pe-ter-Pi-per! Hold on! Wait! Come help me carry my nuts!"

But when she came to the road behind the brushwood, where any passer-by should have been in open view, there was nobody to be seen.

Alfaretta recovered her spent breath, peered into the distance either way, and disgustedly ejaculated:

"If that don't beat the Dutch! I know 'twas him, and he ain't no fairy to vanish that way. Pshaw! I've had my trouble for my pains, and now I've got to go all the way back after those plaguey baskets. Just like Ma Babcock says: 'If you'd be well served just served yourself.' S'pose I'll have to; but I'd give a tin sixpense to know why that Dolly didn't come back!"

And so would many others before that night ended.

CHAPTER VI

AN UNPLEASANT ADVENTURE

It surely was an hour of mysteries.

Alfaretta sat for some time by the roadside, wondering what had become of Peter Piper; wondering if it were really he whom she had seen; and, feeling a bit over-tired, falling into a comfortable doze. She had a habit of doing this, at any time and place; and it amused Dorothy to see how quickly her friend could go to sleep and how suddenly she would awake, to continue whatever she had been saying at the moment when drowsiness overcame her.

Now she rested with her head against a stone wall, bordering the road, and was dreaming of being buried beneath an avalanche of prickly chestnut burrs, till she was startled into wakefulness by at least a portion of her vision coming true.

"Who's a doin' it!" she demanded, angrily, as a real burr did fall upon her up-tilted nose.

The chattering of a belated squirrel overhead answered her, as he scampered away to bed in the dusk that had already fallen.

"Huh! nothin' but a chippy! But, my heart! I must ha' gone to sleep and stayed so! It's so dark I

can hardly see, and back there in the woods it's almost black as — as 'Iser rolling rapidly,' like it says in the reading book. I'm half a mind not to go after them baskets, but leave 'em there till morning. Yet I can't do that. I've got to help Ma churn then. Never seems as if there was a minute between the time I wake up and Seth Winters begins to blow his whistle for us scholars to come. Even if he don't keep school regular fashion, like other teachers do, he's mighty particular 'bout one thing and that's punc — punctueral-ity. He says nine o'clock's nine o'clock. 'Tain't a minute before nor after, and — I guess I better go get 'em. Seems if there's as many squirrels and things after the nuts this year as there is nuts, seems if! As for them districters — Huh! I sure better go after the baskets, but it's — it's dreadful spooky-lookin' under the trees!"

Alfaretta was not easily frightened by visible objects, but it was of "fairies" and "hobgoblins," such as Molly Martin declared dwelt in the forest, that she now thought. However, thoughts also of the money value of her nuts and the danger of losing them overcame her hesitation and she hurried back to the spot where she had left them.

They had disappeared. Neither of nut nor basket was there a vestige left.

"My heart! Gone! All them splendid nuts! What's got 'em? I know this is the very tree, 'count of that broken limb restin' against the trunk that way. Wouldn't be two trees just exactly alike, sure. I be-

lieve — somebody's stole 'em! Baskets were too heavy for fairies; and squirrels wouldn't carry off the baskets, even if they did what was in 'em. I didn't sleep long enough, anyway, for 'em to take so many, one to a time as they'd have to. No, indeedy! If it's fairies it's been two-legged ones! Though I s'pose all fairies are that kind," said Alfaretta to herself, wanting any better listener. Now that she was again in the depth of the wood, where the trees were more discernible at such close range, her courage had returned and anger against the unknown thief had taken its place.

Arms akimbo, she stood and peered into the dim distances, intently listening for some betraying footstep. Nothing moved; but the utter stillness was suddenly broken by a most unearthly shriek. It seemed to come from above, below, beside her; and it half-froze her blood in her veins — so startling it was. For an instant she couldn't move; but when the cry was repeated she turned and sped out of the wood as if some demon pursued her. And not until she had regained the road and was well on her homeward way did she remember the cry of a screech-owl, and understand that it was such a harmless creature which had terrified her.

Meanwhile, speeding on her own way to ask about her violin lessons, Dorothy also caught a fleeting glimpse of Peter Piper. Days before he had deserted the blacksmith whom she knew was anxious concerning the lad; for though Peter had been so happy at first he had acted very strangely afterward.

Diverted from her own purpose by sight of him she followed, calling: "Peter! Peter Piper! Wait! I want you!"

He paused a moment. Indeed, waited till she almost came up with him; when, after a prolonged stare into her face, he abruptly turned and fled. This was enough provocation for Dorothy. She forgot other matters in this chance for a fine race and started in pursuit.

Fast they ran and far. So far that the girl did not recognize the road into which Peter turned, and though he seemed to limp a little he managed to keep just far enough away from her to make capture probable — yet a failure.

"Why, Peter-boy," she called, though half-breathless from her exertions, "why do you run away from me? I thought you liked me, so well they called you my 'Shadow' and yet — Wait! Ah! Now I have you!"

He had suddenly veered from the road, crossed half a field, and disappeared within a small building that stood there, its wide door invitingly open. Little dreaming what had caused him to leave the open road, the girl followed him, caught up with him, and sprang down into the cellar-like base of the disused barn.

In the dimness she did not at first discover him, and when she did it was to be sorry for her own action in forcing him thither. He had leaped recklessly down into the empty "bay" where in other years hay had been stored and had freshly injured his lame ankle,

which he had somehow sprained some time before. His moans took her to his side and now her eyes had grown accustomed to the change from the brighter light outside the barn, so that she saw him to be pale and haggard and that his homely features were contorted with pain.

Kneeling beside him she sought to comfort him, crooning away as she would have done to Lady Rosalind, her kitten, or any other dumb creature in distress. At that moment he seemed little like a human being and more like a suffering animal, so pitiful his whines and groans.

Then all at once — darkness! The heavy door had banged shut, there was the click of a spring lock, and at once Dorothy was hopelessly imprisoned in an out-of-the-way building with a demented lad as sole companion.

She caught the sounds of a heavy wagon, rumbling along the distant road; heard a man's voice speaking angrily, and the excited ones of boys answering him. One of the boys seemed to be protesting against some command of the man in the wagon, but the protests were apparently, of no avail; and his companions now became silent.

Dorothy screamed her loudest. Then she climbed to the top of the barn's stone foundation, to the beam against which the door had closed, and pounded with all her puny might upon the panels, but no answer came; and then she realized that she was forsaken, entrapped, and must stay where she was till her ab-

sence from home awoke anxiety and somebody came to seek her.

But how would they know where to look? Who'd dream of her being in that strange field and that isolated building? Had the wind blown the door shut or had some mischievous person locked her in? Was that boy's voice, protesting, Mike Martin's? It sounded so, and she remembered having seen his father drive his lumber wagon past her home that day, driving into Newburgh upon some farming errand. He had stopped and "passed the time of day" with her father, busy in his rose-garden.

That beloved rose-garden! Thought of it sent a fresh dismay through Dorothy's heart. It was, of course, a new one, and had been one of the first luxuries permitted to the ex-postman, when the discovery of the iron mine upon his land had warranted some "useless" expenditures. "Useless," Martha had called it until she saw the vast delight the matter gave her lame husband. What studying of florists' catalogues there had been! What careful calculations how to spend a few dollars to the best advantage! What exciting anxiety over the unpacking of the little wooden boxes in which the rose-bushes had been shipped! Very tiny most of the plants had been; not half as long as their names, Martha had declared, but precious indeed to her nature-loving husband.

Dorothy's last glimpse of that beloved Father John, as she left home for her nutting expedition, had been of him leaning upon his crutches and tenderly loosen-

ing the soil about his small "treasures;" for, save herself, he would allow nobody else to work among them. Now, in this imprisonment, she recalled that beloved figure with something like despair; for less and less improbable it grew that any searchers would think of this isolated, closed building as a spot where she might be found. If only Peter would stop moaning! She would rather have been alone, she felt.

However, it proved better that she had even his company. Unable to endure his whining she at last roused from her own anxiety to try and comfort him. By this time it was night, but there was a moon at the full and sufficient light came through the cracks of the walls to make the interior visible.

Making her way to where the half-wit lay huddled in a most uncomfortable heap she laid her hand upon his shoulder and said, both sternly, yet coaxingly:

"Now, Peter-boy, you must stop that, you know! Right away. Show me where you're hurt worst and I'll help you. We're locked in, so you couldn't run away again, even if you were able. We've got to make the best of it. Roll over on your side. Stick out the hurt foot. Let me see to it."

Whatever had made him run from her, or hide from all his friends as had been the case, the unfortunate sufferer forgot. The old habit of confidence in her, devotion to her, made him instantly obedient. He did stretch out his leg, though the pain in his sprained ankle made him screech afresh, as he did so. However. Dorothy schooled herself to pay no heed to

this outburst and gently felt of the injured member. It was horribly swollen, so that the flesh puffed far beyond the top of the ragged shoe, and the girl herself groaned in sympathy.

"Dear, dear! I don't wonder you moan. Give me your knife, laddie, the one father lent you to prune the bushes with. I want to cut these leather shoestrings and take the boot off. That'll make it easier."

She wasn't at all sure that he still carried the knife or that he would obey her if he had; but, instantly, he fumbled in his pocket and produced it.

"I shall have to do it slowly, Peter, so as not to cut the flesh, so be patient!"

There was scant need of this caution. He seemed to have resigned himself into her hands, once more, as wholly as in the first days of his life at the cottage; and though he still moaned it was less trying to hear him. When the shoe was loosened and drawn off the worn out stocking came with it; and a little shiver of repugnance swept over the sensitive girl. She felt that she could not touch that hot and swollen flesh. Yet, almost as quickly, came self-reproof, and she braced her effort with the thought:

"If it's so horrid just to handle it what must it be to endure it! Dorothy, behave yourself!" Aloud she said:

"I'm going to tie my handkerchief around it, tight as tight! I wish I had some water but I haven't — now. Soon's we get out I'll wet the cloth and that will soothe it."

But when tried the little handkerchief was far too small to be of any use; though, fortunately as it seemed, Dorothy had cried into it so much that it was at least moist and cool as she spread it over the swollen flesh.

"Have to take a piece of my gingham frock, I reckon, Peter-boy. Hope Mother Martha won't mind, for such a thing, though it's right new and pretty. Can't help it — when needs must, as father says!"

Picking up the knife again she set the point of the blade into a seam and swiftly ripped out the front half of her skirt. This she cut into strips, leaving a little portion at each end not cut through so that instead of many short pieces she had, by folding, one long, continuous bandage.

"That's the way I've seen mother fix it when she had a lame finger or burnt wrist; and it'll be fine, just fine! Now, so; I'll begin at the toes and wrap along up the foot and ankle, as far as the cloth will go. That keeps the blood pushed up, sort of, you know, and stops the aching. Tight? I shall make it real, real tight, to take down the swelling, and don't you say 'Ouch!' 'cause it won't make a bit of difference. I shan't stop, I'm the surgeon and you're the patient, and if I give you what father calls 'heroic treatment' it's to do you good. One day, Mother Martha jumped over a stone wall into the far field and hurt her leg on a sharp blackberry stub, where the picnic men had trimmed the bushes with their sycles. It hurt her awful — Umm! So she could hardly get

home, even if she hopped all the way on the good foot. Swell? I should say so. But she showed father how to fix a bandage quick, just this way, only out of white cloth, course, and he wound it upwards, around and around — just like this — and the swelling got littler and littler, and she could walk all around same as ever. So can you, when — when you get a chance!"

There's no cure for personal distress so certain as doing something kind to somebody else. In ministering to poor Peter Piper Dorothy forgot, or ceased to worry over her own unfortunate plight; and in chattering away to keep him quiet became herself cheerful. By the time the bandage was fastened, by tying her hair-ribbon over it, the prospect of release was very different from at first.

"Of course, laddie, they'll miss me and hunt me up right away. When it comes dark mother Martha'll know that Mr. Seth would have sent me home, even if I'd gone there to supper, as I have done twice. I didn't start for the smithy in the beginning. Course. I just went to gather nuts with Alfy Babcock. Then I heard the music and went to find out and — and — Course! They'll be sure, *sure,* to hunt us up! Likely they will see this old barn and look here. Likely. Any way — Peter Piper! Is that a new kind of a groan of grunt or — or is it — snoring? My heart! I just believe it's that!"

"That" it was, indeed. The wandering lad had a habit of sleeping at odd times, spending much of the

night time prowling about the country. He was very tired, he had suffered great pain, and under Dorothy's ministrations the pain had wonderfully lessened. Also, having once more resigned himself to her presence, he felt that she would take care of him and that he was safe. The fears which had tortured him and driven him away from Seth Winter's home had vanished, at least for the time being, and soothed by her aid as well as by the quiet and dimness of the place he was already sound asleep on a bed not much harder than he had usually had.

Dorothy laughed, sighed, and thought how hungry she was. She was inclined to wake the lad, but reflected that he was now free from suffering and refrained. Then she wondered if she, too, couldn't take a nap.

"Just while I wait for the folks to come and find me, I'll poke around and gather all the hay I can get off the floor into a heap. There's quite a lot of it. Kind of musty-smelling, like it had been here a good while: but — better than bare dirt! My! I guess this is what you could call an 'adventure'. 'Tisn't quite as dreadful as that Stott adventure, when I was kidnapped and Jim helped me to get free. Dear, good-hearted Jim! I wish he was here this minute! If he knew he wouldn't let the grass grow under his feet while he was coming to open that door. But he doesn't know, of course. And — I'll just stop thinking. I'm going to sleep. I am. I will. I'll say the multiplication table backwards as well as forwards, and count sheep jumping over a wall, and — There!

That's real soft, that heap. And it isn't so very musty — not so very! I'll say my prayers, now; and say them for poor Peter Piper, too. I did so hate to fix his foot but I'm glad I did. I shall want to wash my hands a lot when I get to some water; but doing that bandaging, against my will, makes me feel as clean inside as my finical fingers feel smirched."

Kneeling down in that strange place, the little maid reverently offered her simple petitions, with full faith that they would be duly answered; then murmuring aloud: "Good night, everybody, and all this beautiful world! How lovely you will look in the morning. Everything will be all right then — in the morning! I am not afraid, any longer. The dear Lord is taking care and I shall be safe;" she laid her head on the musty hay and began to count her sheep.

But not many of the imaginary flock had jumped over the stone wall before drowsiness overcame her and she, too, was asleep. So soundly, so peacefully, that she knew nothing of a figure crossing the field and stealthily approaching the barn.

The moonlight was clouded by this time; a storm was rapidly rising, and yet the figure moved slowly, watchfully, as if fearful of pursuit, until it reached the closed door and its trembling hands fumbled with the spring lock. But — the hands held no key, without which the lock refused to open. Also, while effort after effort was made to overcome this difficulty, by main force of the strong hands, the storm burst and the rain came down in a drenching torrent.

CHAPTER VII

MIKE AND MIDNIGHT

THERE was trouble in the Martins' home on south-side the mountain.

Mr. Martin's trip to Newburgh on that autumn afternoon had been an unsuccessful one. He had taken a load of produce to market and had not realized one-half the anticipated profits from its sale. He had met miller Sands and had had a stormy interview with that suave gentleman.

The report he brought to his hard-working wife confused her, for she understood little about "protested notes" and overdue "promises to pay." All the fact that did penetrate her tired brain was that:

"If we can't raise the money to pay off Oliver's mortgage in thirty days' time, we'll be sold out. Farm and chattel both, he holds, and can set us on the roadside without stick or stone belongin'. Worse, a hundred times, wife, than when we landed from the old country with only a last pound betwixt us."

So her husband had said: then he had turned upon Mike as the readiest victim of his wrath:

"Get to work, I tell you! Don't stand there like a wooden image! Put up them horses! Feed the pigs!

Milk the cows — all of 'em. I'm too tired and cross to touch one of 'em, to-night. Spoils a cow to milk her in a rage and — and — I'd like to do somebody a bad turn this minute, I would that! Fool, fool, that I was! To hang the millstone of debt around my own neck. If I'd kept the one acre I could pay for — but what's the use!"

Mrs. Martin began to cry, yet shoved a chair toward her irate husband and proffered him his pipe. Commonly a pull at the old clay would sooth him better than any spoken words, but not then. He took the pipe, tossed it upon the table, kicked the cat out of his way, and shouted for Molly.

The girl was his pet and could hardly do wrong, in his judgment, but the sound of her "skylarking" with her sisters in the out-kitchen at that moment added fresh fuel to his anger.

"You good-for-nothing girl! Why ben't you gettin' the supper on, and helpin' the mother with the tasks? Do yez all think I can work and slave for the load of ye, and not a one to lift her hand to the father's aid? Get to work, I say! Set the house to one side, pick up them playthings, fetch in a lot of kindlin'— Begorra! 'Tis enough to drive a man crazy, such slackness all around. No wonder we're all on the road to the poorhouse! No wonder, with such a family of lazy-bones to feed, that I could never pay the note when it was due! But it's no home you'll be havin', come this day month, and mind ye that!"

He banged his way out of doors, leaving consterna-

tion behind him. A man of fiery temper yet most affectionate heart. Whose brief rages acted like an electric storm, clearing the domestic atmosphere of all unpleasantness and leading the way to extra good times afterward.

But to-night was different. The father had said things which were not easily forgotten and it was an awed and unhappy household which watched his exit toward the far barn, where he usually secluded himself when in any trouble.

His way thither lay through a long woodshed adjoining the little farmhouse, and the passage was littered with many things. Not least of all, two baskets, over which he stumbled in the gathering darkness and that threw him headlong to the floor.

Though he was not hurt it needed but this accident to infuriate him beyond all bounds. Rising, his first act was to seize the baskets and fling their contents through the open side of the shed. Then he returned to the kitchen, baskets in hand, and demanded:

"Where's that Mike? So this is what he was doin', was it? And me picking him up along the road home, believin' he'd been digging the potatoes I'd planted on shares with Mis' Babcock! Wasting his time. Gatherin' nuts! A boy that'd ought to be toilin' every instant he was out of school, and me givin' him the fine chance at learnin' such as never I had in me life! Nut-gatherin'! I'll teach him! Step out to the barn alongside, me son and heir, and I'll make ye dance to

the tune of strap-and-switch-'em, till ye'll realize that a minor's time belongs to the daddy that owns him, body and bones, and — Whisht! What's that? What's that?"

He was in the act of crushing the market-baskets in his great fingers, when his wife's hand fell on his arm with a protesting force.

"Hold, Dennis! Them aren't our baskets. There's somethin' printed on the handles. They look like — Read it out, Molly. You that have had the schoolin'. What's that sayin' there?"

Molly came hesitatingly forward, keeping on the far side of her mother and peering across her to read by the candle held the owner's name, stencilled upon the wood.

"'The Mountain Farm'. That's what it is. They're Mis' Martha's baskets," falteringly announced the girl.

An ominous pause followed. Mike, who had lingered with his mother after his father's first tirade, now attempted escape; but Dennis was before him blocking the passage and clutching the lad's shoulder with a painful grip.

Mike sought to wriggle himself free, and fruitlessly. There was no evading that detaining grasp nor the now low, stern voice which commanded:

"Tell me how you came by those baskets, Michael Martin, and by what was in 'em."

Mike frowned and was silent.

"Answer!"

The boy minded less his father's former bluster than this low inexorable tone. Finally, he faltered what was partly true:

"I — I found 'em."

"Was they give to you?" came the next question stern and unconvinced.

"No — no-o! You — you — hurt! Lemme go!"

"Hmm. Well. So besides bein' sold out and set on the road I'm disgraced by me own son. Me son Michael, named for me father, the best and honestest man in old Connemara, me son Michael is a — THIEF!"

He seemed fairly to hiss the word though he did not raise his voice an atom. Not even when, turning quietly, a basket in either hand, he added:

"There's only one place for a thief, a boy thief. That's in the House of Correction. The farrier can furnish the papers and commit the prisoner. I go to seek him now and to return the baskets. The price of the nuts — No need for that, though. Bridget, set the little gossoons to pickin' up them I tossed out. Not one must they keep. If 'tis too dark, the now, wake them by daylight and set them to the job. Mike Martin, do your chores. The last chores you're ever to do on this farm."

And now he was really gone; but those he left behind would greatly have preferred his first angry mood to this solemn sorrow that had fallen upon him. Not one of them, however, believed that the farmer would really seek to have his son committed to a lock-

up, and that the boy's escapade would result in anything serious.

"Now, Mikey darlint, tell the mother the whole tale!" begged Mrs. Martin, when her husband had really set off for "over mounting" upon his painful errand.

"Nothin' to tell. Some of us fellers was nuttin' and we come to them baskets, somebody had left there in the woods. Likely them two girls that's so thick, that Dorothy and Alfy Babcock. And we took 'em just — just for fun."

"Don't seem very funny now, does it?" asked Molly, sadly.

"Oh! shucks! And comin' along home we saw — I saw, I was alone then, I saw —"

"There, son, don't stop to talk any more. Go do your chores, and do 'em careful. The best way to get your father over his anger is to work fast and well. I'll have supper ready, against you come in. It'll be gettin' dark soon and I don't like to have you take the lantern into the barn amongst the hay. If it does get so you can't see, I'll fetch it myself. Fly around, Molly, and you young ones, go set by the winder and learn your spellin'."

"But, Ma! There's somethin' else, I want to tell you. Somethin' worse and you'll have to help me out. I —"

The troubled farmwife raised her hand, protesting:

"No, no! If there's anything worse I don't want to hear it! I've got all the worriment I can stand

for one spell. Go do your chores. Don't add fault to fault!"

She went out hastily, leaving the unhappy lad gazing after her in dire dismay. Then he muttered:

"Well, I can't help it. I tried to tell but she wouldn't listen, and I'm in for a heap of trouble anyhow. 'Might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, and I'll be hung either case. But I wish — I wish every plaguey nut tree in the woods had burned to the ground, time of that fire! And I wish — I wish — ho, hum!" Then he went about his tasks perhaps the most unhappy lad in all that countryside that night. Only Jim Barlow, faithful fellow, may have suffered more, yet not from the guilt which so tormented the happy-go-lucky, mischief-loving Irish boy.

Dennis walked rapidly to the cottage on the height. By the time he reached it the night had come and though it was a brilliant, moonlit one, the house seemed dark and cheerless. There was no light visible except in the kitchen where a lantern had been left, as the safest sort of lamp. The door was closed, and peering through the window he saw that the room was empty. No answer came to his heavy rap upon the door, and a curious sense of disaster stole over him. He had all the superstitions of his race and the howling of a hound, somewhere in the distance, sent a shiver through him. Though the shiver may have come, as well, from his rapid walk over the hill-top and his present pause in the cool air.

"Looks as if there was trouble here, too. Hope

that howlin' don't mean death a-comin' to nobody! I'll go round to that back door, where the master's room is, and try again."

But he moved noiselessly, as if in the presence of some vague mystery, and this time his tap upon the upper closed door was as soft as if he really wished no answer, or as if he were disturbing some ailing body.

There was nobody within. That was evident, and by this time Dennis had almost forgotten his own anxieties in curiosity concerning his neighbors. As, at length, he turned away to go around the corner of the house, a woman came flying up the path. She was dishevelled, her hair torn down by the shawl which had slipped from her head and she panted from exertion. So that the farmer had difficulty in understanding her frantic petition:

"Have you found her? Tell me, good man, have you found her?"

"Ma'am?" faltered the amazed Mr. Martin.

"Oh! Don't you know? Haven't you heard? Will you join in the search that everybody's making? Oh! My little girl, my Dorothy is lost!"

It took some moments before the slow brain of Dennis Martin could comprehend the calamity which had befallen. That anybody with the free use of her limbs should be "lost" on that quiet mountain seemed incredible. At this season even such few "tramps" as ever infested the region were never seen; all summer residents had long ago departed; none were left

hereabout save such people as "belonged" and they were the friendliest possible.

"Lost? Lost! That bonny lassie, that had ever a perlite good mornin' for whoever she met, and that the good farrier loved like his own? Sure, Ma'am, 'tis the hard word you're speakin' and one not easy to believe."

Poor mother Martha pushed open the unlocked door and went in, motioning Dennis to follow. He did so but stood awkwardly just inside the doorway, looking pityingly upon the woman who had sunk into a chair and covered her face with her hands. Twirling his hat around and around he finally asked:

"Would you mind givin' me the facts of it, body and bones, Ma'am?"

"There's little to tell. My daughter went away with Alfaretta Babcock to gather nuts in the woods. They stayed there some time, till they had filled their baskets — What? Have you found those?"

For the first time, now that she had mechanically lighted the lamp upon the table, she noticed the two empty baskets upon Mr. Martin's arm and recognized them for her own, and the same she had lent the two girls for their frolic.

"No, Ma'am, I haven't found 'em so to speak. 'Twas in the woods my boy did and I come — What was in 'em he —"

"But my Dorothy! Did he see her? Quick, quick!" she cried, interrupting.

"Not that I heard, Ma'am. I come —"

"Will you join the searchers? They are everywhere about, seeking in all directions."

"Sure will I that, with all me heart and soul! I've a lass of me own that if aught befell — Ah! But the tale of it, now, that I go not amiss in the seeking. And by your leave I'll sit on this chair whiles I listen."

It was such relief to anxious mother Martha to talk that before she was quite aware that she was wasting precious time she had related all of Dorothy's history.

"Found her on our doorstep we did, John and I. With her name pinned fast to her cloak and the message that she'd come to be our child, since other we had not. The happiest, busiest, most mischievous little one she was! But so dear, so dear! To my poor husband like his own soul. It nigh killed him when a wicked man coaxed her away, believing she was of rich parentage and great money would be paid for her return. All that story you may have heard. If not this isn't the time to tell it.

"Why, everybody loves our Dolly! That rich Mrs. Calvert — she wanted to adopt her away from us — as if the darling child would leave us! The Montaignes — all, all, who know her love her, and now — She's lost, *she's lost!*"

Dennis set down the baskets. His own errand could well wait a more convenient season; and being a practical man, he again questioned:

"All about it, please? Who saw her last and

where? Which way are the men looking and who're they? Then I'll have me own notions of the truth and what is best."

So she answered more concisely. Told him all that Alfaretta knew, and all that Seth Winters did. How the latter had sat long expecting her return to the smithy with her parents' decision about the violin lessons. How old Job Wilmot had also waited till dark fell and had departed, disappointed. How Jim Barlow had come to the shop and been given a message for Dorothy from the blacksmith and calling at the cottage to deliver it had learned of her absence. Of how the search for her then began, but with no thought of anything more serious than that she had gone home to supper with Alfaretta without asking permission — which would once have seemed a grievous disobedience to her mother and now such a desirable one.

"Thank ye, Ma'am. Now I'll start. And if I might make so bold as to advise, I'd say you'd better make yourself a cup of tea and get a bit supper ready, again' the lassie comes home hungry and all unknowing what a bobbery she's kicked up. Trust me, Ma'am. 'Twill all come right: and I'll hunt the bairn as if she was me own little Moll."

With that he pulled his forelock and strode away, all his thoughts intent upon where to look for Dorothy and none left to brood over any "disgrace" his "son and heir" had brought upon him.

Back at his own home quiet now reigned. Mike

had diligently gone about his "chores," yet in an absent manner which his mother attributed to anxiety over his father's anger; though he surprised her as he was just climbing the stairs to his attic chamber, by asking:

"Ma, how long can folks live without eating? If they hadn't had any supper, nor water to drink, nor — nor — only dirt to lie on?"

"Oh! I don't know. What you botherin' your mind about that for? Don't you dare go get notions in your head about runnin' away and such trash, like some boys do when their fathers are mad at 'em. You needn't go cutting off your nose to spite your face; there's no common sense in that. Your father will get over his anger, after a spell. He won't get you took up. Go to bed and behave yourself in the future."

With this motherly advice she dismissed her son and his troubles; and though she sat for a time alone, after the children were all a-bed, wondering why Dennis did not return she soon followed the example of the others and went to sleep.

But for the first time in his life Mike Martin could not rest. His pillow might have been of thorns, so often did he turn and beat it seeking a softer side, though it was the same one on which he commonly fell asleep the moment his head touched it. He, too, lay and listened for his father's footstep below; but at length could endure his self-torture no longer. A vision of a bright faced girl in a red frock, slowly

paling and wasting in starvation, seemed to pass and repass before his wakeful eyes; and when the rising wind moaned through the chimney and a flash of lightning showed at the window, he shivered and hid his face beneath the covers.

Alas! he couldn't hide from that accusing vision! Right through the patchwork quilt it pierced and tormented him. Till, desperate, he rose at last, slipped on his stockings and clothes, took his shoes in his hand and crept softly down the stairs.

All quiet. Not a sound anywhere, save his mother's heavy breathing which proved that the toilworn woman was sleeping soundly.

Noiselessly lifting the latch, he opened another door and crept down another flight of stairs into the cool moist cellar. He knew his way well to the little wire-sided "safe" where Bridget kept their daily food.

There had been a great treat prepared against the morrow's Sunday dinner. It was a tiny pig, roasted whole, and a luxury on many a richer table. But because he could not sell the creature and already had more pigs than he could winter Dennis had given it to his wife to prepare, with the injunction:

"Make it go a long way, woman, mind! Such fare as that isn't for poor folk like us, only on such a case as this. Should last us the week out, belike, if the children aren't too greedy."

Bridget had felt rich indeed with so much fresh meat on hand and Mike, as well as the others, had looked forward to that dinner when, re-heated and

served with potatoes "done in the pan," they should all fare "like kings."

But he did not hesitate now, nor allow regret to interfere with his purpose. Slipping off his not too clean blouse he put the pig into it, added a loaf of bread, emptied a pan of milk into a convenient pail and made his way silently out of the house.

Once clear of the premises, and no sign of his father returning, he set off at a lively pace across fields and over the hill-top toward that distant meadow where Dorothy and Peter Piper had been imprisoned. It was he who had crept so watchfully up to the door of the old barn and stealthily tried the lock.

Ah! it had been so easy to shut it! It had seemed such a prime joke, seeing the girl chase Peter into it, to creep up after them and entrap them there.

"For just a little while. Just long enough to scare 'em well. Then I'll open the door and hide and watch the fun, while they wonder and guess, but'll never find out who played 'em the trick. Anyhow, they're north-siders and it's a fair fight."

But — things don't always go as they are planned. Mike hadn't reckoned upon his father's return from Newburgh at just that moment; nor upon being discovered in that field where he had no business to take him; nor at the further discovery that he had played "hookey" from Mrs. Babcock's potato-patch and gone nut-gathering — nut-pilfering — instead.

He had tried to beg off, had assured his father that he'd rather walk "cross lots" than ride in that jolting

lumber-wagon. Of no avail. Dennis Martin knew that a son in hand was worth two in a neighbor's field and, willy nilly, Mike was forced to climb into the back of the wagon and go home at once. He managed to screen the contents of the baskets by throwing some empty sacks over them and to leap down with them as the wagon passed the woodshed door. His thought was:

"I'll sneak back there, soon's my chores are done and let 'em out."

Yet here it was, at dead of night, when he made this attempt. He didn't enjoy thunder-storms, even when safe beneath a roof, but now his anxiety over the outcome of his "joke" was greater than his fear of the lightning.

The distance to be covered before he reached that old barn semed endless to him. He was so buffeted by the tempest that he had much ado to walk, much less to run, and he moved with head bent against the wind and his arms huddled about his body to keep off as much of the rain as might be. But he was drenched through, even the bundle of blouse-wrapped food was soaked and he dropped it on the ground before the barn with a pity that such luxuries were spoiled.

With his ear against the door he listened intently. All was silent within.

"Are they dead or smothered?" he wondered, then once more tried the lock. It still resisted his efforts and careless now whether he were heard or not he

picked up a stone which the lightning revealed and forcing its jagged edge under the hasp pried it off. Even yet there was no sound beyond the roar of the storm, and the unhappy lad was freshly convinced that his victims were dead.

When the wind seized the heavy door out of his grasp and flung it back against the wall he screamed, and would have fled. But in so doing he stumbled over the bundle at his feet and reflected that if the blouse were left there he would be found out. Hastily unfolding it he tossed the pig and loaf into the "bay" and set the pail of milk which he had carried in the bend of his elbow through all his walk just inside the entrance on the broad foundation beam. Then he sped homeward and regaining his chamber unheard crept into bed without undressing.

There, alternately shivering and burning with fever, his mother found him late the next morning, when neither her husband had returned nor anybody attended to the early "chores" of the farm.

"Why, Mikey, Mikey! Whatever ails you, lad?"

"I — I'm sick, Ma. I guess it's the — the measles!"

"Land save us! What's possessed ye to go catch *them,* when there's so much work to do? And son, son! Whyfore did ye go to bed in your clothes and how come they so wet? Didn't ye know 'twould spoil me clean sheets? And sick — Well, ye deserve to be, cuttin' up such pranks, a great boy like you! Is the whole world bewitched? With your father gone the

night long and no token of him dead or alive! And me cellar broke into, and me little suckin' pig that was done to a turn all gone! Me bread box empty and me milk-pan overturned! Sure, acushla, 'tis the strange night of me life.

"Up with ye, son, and to the work. Put on your other clothes and hang these to dry in the sun. The cows is sufferin' to be milked, the hogs is squealin' their heads off, and here you lie like a lazy gossoon that ye are! Sick or well, there's no time to bother. Up with ye and to work!"

With such scant sympathy was the really ailing lad aroused, and lying half-unconscious on the stable floor his mother again found him when breakfast was ready and she went to summon him.

CHAPTER VIII

A LETTER AND ITS RESULTS

THE sunshine coming through the open doorway of the barn and falling on her face awoke Dorothy. She had slept through all the noise of the storm. She had not even heard Mike's hammering at the lock. She had not even dreamed, though she felt, at first, that she must be doing that now, as she sat up and looked about her — puzzled by her strange surroundings.

Then it all came back to her and she tried to spring to her feet but felt her legs strangely stiff and lame. Lying upon damp hay and a dirt floor had affected even her young muscles, and she stretched herself wearily, as she called to Peter Piper still sleeping in his own far corner.

"Peter-boy! Wake up! That door is open and we can go home! The queerest kind of a door, seems if, that can blow itself shut and then blow itself open again! And — Look there — look there!"

She pointed excitedly to the tiny pig lying near, its little legs pinioned to its fat sides and its skin so crisp and brown. It seemed begging to be eaten and she felt most ready to eat it.

Peter had promptly discovered the food, even before

she pointed it out, and he now crawled forward to secure it. With that and the loaf he began at once to make such a breakfast as he had not enjoyed during his past wanderings and Dorothy almost forgot her own hunger seeing how famished he was.

She saw the pail of milk standing upon the beam and took it down, exclaiming and wondering:

"Isn't it the strangest thing! Who's brought us this food? Did anybody know we were shut in here, after all? If folks did why didn't they wake us up when they came? Anyhow, somebody's been mighty kind, if they meant this breakfast for us, and whether 'twas meant or not I've got to eat something. I'm 'most starved! and you look as if that poor little piggy-wig tasted fine! Unhappy piggy, cut off in its babyhood. Yet if it had lived it would have died anyway; and that's what father would call an Irish speech. Maybe it didn't hurt it any more to die little than to die big — and my heart! How silly I am! But I'm so happy, so happy, to see that door open and know we are free. If I wasn't so hungry I should sing, but we must hurry, hurry. Do you suppose mother and father worried much? Oh! I hope they just thought I'd gone home with Alfy and stayed all night. I've never done such a thing without telling, but that's what I hope they thought, for I'd rather be scolded than have them worried. My! this is good!"

Peter's all-useful knife had carved the pig though, at first, he had torn a portion, unable to wait for any carving. It rather diminished Dorothy's appetite

when she happened to think to how many uses that knife had probably been put; and it would have still further lessened it had she seen the soiled and dripping blouse in which Mike Martin had wrapped this breakfast. However, this wasn't a time to be "fussy;" and for awhile neither she nor Peter interrupted their repast by speaking. Then she jumped up and said:

"Come, Peter Piper, we must hurry home!"

He licked his fingers, pointed to his foot, and shook his head. Indeed, he was now fully content. The injured ankle gave him little pain so long as he kept it quiet and Mike's provisions seemed a boundless store. The old barn was as comfortable a habitation as many another he had known and he was minded to stay in it. At least, while it hurt him so to walk and he seemed so safe from the things which had frightened him awhile back.

"Oh! I see. I don't suppose you could go very far without your foot being fixed better. Well, never mind. I'm going this instant but I won't forget to send somebody after you and to help you. Stay right here and go to sleep again. Somebody'll come. Good by!"

She was out of the barn and away; and the dull lad was glad to see her go. She had eaten such a big piece of that little pig! and regretfully regarding it he murmured:

"Now, ain't that a pity? Ain't it a pity!"

Then her spoken words returned to him, lingered

in his stupid brain, tormented and frightened him.

"Somebody 'll come. I'll send somebody."

Well, if she did, that "somebody" shouldn't find him when he came! With her, his beloved Dorothy, he was safe and most content; but not with any unknown "somebody."

. . . . . .

"Mother! Dearest mother Martha!"

The cottage mistress stood leaning her head against the door frame in utter dejection. At that joyful cry she looked up, scarcely believing the evidence of her own senses, but an instant later had her arms about the girl, lavishing upon her all the affection she so generally kept shut up in her own breast.

"Dolly! My little Dolly! My child, my precious! My daughter that was 'sent'! Where have you been, where have you been? Why — why — what —"

And now she was holding Dorothy off the better to study her beloved features, yet also beholding the girl's dishevelled appearance, the ruined frock, the smut and soil of the hard bed on which she had so soundly slept.

"Why, mother, dearest mother! Have you been so worried? I am so sorry, but you see I couldn't help. Why, you're actually trembling! Is it all on account of me? Sit down, and I'll tell, only I do hope you won't blame me so very much, though I ought not to have followed and chased him, then it wouldn't all have happened. I see that now, when it's too late. But — Listen, dear;" and in a torrent of words Dor-

othy poured forth the tale of her adventures, from the moment of her leaving home with Alfaretta on the afternoon before. She finished by asking for Father John, and begging that he would go at once with the piebald pony, Portia, and the phaeton to fetch the lame lad home; and by begging her mother's forgiveness for the anxiety she had caused.

Oddly enough, or it may be naturally, Martha's vexation increased as her anxiety decreased; and after she had described her own troubled night, she exclaimed:

"It's so dreadfully provoking! Here we've raised the whole neighborhood, sent every able-bodied man to search the woods and villages, and even the river! Your father hasn't lain down one minute since we found you hadn't been to the Babcocks'. As for poor Mr. Winters and Jim Barlow, they're simply frantic. They as well as John have been out the whole night long, paying no attention to that terrible storm —"

"Storm, mother? I didn't know it stormed, and I'm so sorry, I'm heart-broken over the whole miserable business."

"Didn't know it stormed? The idea! Why it was a regular tempest, and all any of us could think about was just you out in it, drenched or maybe drowned, and — You slept through it! Well, well! Or bad, bad! is the better word. Such a sight you look. Go at once, take a bath, put on everything clean, then come and help straighten the house for the day. Such a Sunday as this is likely to be! I declare I'm fair

ashamed to face the neighbors who'll be coming to ask after you. Indeed, I think that instead of helping me here, you best go, as soon as you have freshened yourself, to the smithy and tell anybody you see the whole story. Ah! there comes one of the searchers this minute. That Irish farmer from the other side the mountain. Mr. Martin. He came to bring back the baskets I lent you girls, but as soon as he learned our trouble he put aside his own business, whatever it was, and started out to look for you! Oh! dear! Why should it ever have happened!"

Why, indeed? thought penitent Dorothy as she followed her mother's directions, and removed from her appearance all traces of the night's misadventure. So that it was a very sweet and dainty girl who came down the stairs again, just as Father John drove the weary Portia into the yard and she ran to meet him.

With him there was no reproof and no useless regret. It was as if he had gained a new lease of life when he once more held his darling in his arms and felt her tender kisses on his thin cheek.

Yet even his forgiving, comforting words could not wholly soothe the girl's conscience and make her feel that her mischievous following of the runaway Peter was anything less than a crime. Nor was she ever to forget that Sunday, with its returning groups of searchers, its endless repetitions of her story, and its effect upon the weary men. To Mrs. Smith she said, at last:

"I declare, it seems as if they'd almost rather I

hadn't been found than have me come home so safe and unharmed!"

"Not so, my dear; though it isn't any play to be up all night and out in stormy weather and the men are tired. We're a hard-working set who 'belong' to our mountain, quite different from the summer folks that come and go. But we're glad, of course; only there's a mystery about the whole matter. That barn door might have blown shut, as you fancied, but it couldn't have unlocked itself and opened of its own accord to let you free. Another mystery is the loss of the baskets and Mr. Martin's finding them. Also, who brought the food and threw it into the barn? It's a queer mess; and not the least strange is that when Seth Winters went back with a wagon to fetch Peter Piper away, the lad had vanished again."

"Well, almost all things come to light in time. Likely these perplexing matters will, too. But I guess you'll not be chasing anybody, wise or simple, into out-of-the-way buildings ever again."

"Never again! And I do hope it won't make any lasting difference in the neighbors' liking me. I'd just give anything to go back and make things as they were before this happened. Mother Martha is — She hasn't quite forgiven me, I know; and I don't like things different! It seems such a little thing after all, to change a girl's life like it looks as if it would!"

It was a "little thing," as she said; and it was only one Sunday out of a year; but it was a day whose

events and decisions were to influence Dorothy's whole future.

For upon that Sunday afternoon, Seth Winters wrote a letter. It wasn't an easy letter for him to write and more than one sigh escaped him as he dipped and redipped his pen in ink to tell his "cousin" Mrs. Betty Calvert his opinion. For this is the epistle he penned, sitting alone in his cosy library, so small yet hitherto so all-sufficient for his pleasure and that now looked so empty — foreseeing that a certain gay little maiden would frequent it no more.

"Dear Betty:

"It won't do. The experiment is a failure. It was a fine dream of mine, to take our little Dorothy and mould her into just the sort of woman we wished, but it was a dream only. Already she has grown wise in wood-and nature-lore, can tell every bird that haunts this mountain, the habits of every little wilding of the forest, and many other things that she'd never learn from printed books and under ordinary school-teachers; but she needs the discipline of the schoolroom. I've decided that an eccentric old bachelor, like me, isn't the best guide for a spirited girl, whose impulses may be all good yet not always directed into the wisest channels."

Here followed the story of Dorothy's captivity in the old barn, of the harsh censure to which Mother Martha now subjected her and the almost harmful cossetting of Father John. That she was allowed both

too much and too little freedom was evident; also that, although Martha was a most excellent woman, there were things of which she was ignorant and that Dorothy must learn. Then the following paragraph, containing the gist of the letter:

"As you asked me to decide what school was best, should any be necessary, I have selected that of the Misses Rhinelander. They are gentlewomen born and bred; their standard of scholarship is high — so are their prices! — and only pupils of unexceptional families are received. Dorothy will have for companions the daughters of our best citizens.

"It saddens me to let her go. I shall, also, dismiss the Babcocks and Smiths. I couldn't go on with my desultory school-keeping without my chief pupil. They can go to the new school, over the mountain, for I find that Dominie Wilmot is a much wiser man than I supposed.

"For the present Jim Barlow will stay with me. He is proving a student of wonderful ability, 'crazy to learn', as he expresses it. But even he may have to go soon. He should have greater advantages than I can give him here and only that I have grown so fond of him I should not hesitate to send him away at once.

"I am writing this on Sunday. By Thursday Dorothy should be at Miss Rhinelander's. The document you left with her guardians and which they mislaid has not been found; so in accomplishing this change I shall use the other note you left with me,

authorising me so to do. I will write again at the end of the week.

"Faithfully yours,

"SETH WINTERS."

That evening the blacksmith had an interview with Father John. What Mother Martha termed a "secret session," since she was not included in it nor consulted; but was simply told the result which was so astonishing that, for a moment, she could not even protest. Even when later she dared to do so her husband's manner was so stern and unhappy that she soon ceased both questions and objections and obeying his command to:

"Get Dorothy ready, as far as you can, to leave us on Wednesday afternoon. To-morrow, I will drive into Newburgh with you to the boarding school of the Misses Rhinelander. They will give you a list of the things she will need as a pupil of their aristocratic establishment. There is no question of expense — that will be provided for. And, as we have so few days left with our darling, let us not embitter them by any discussions. Fortunately, the school is so near we can see her now and then, but things will never be quite the same again;" and the ex-postman sighed profoundly.

Not so his wife. She was both too surprised and too indignant. She merely went away, muttering:

"I almost wish we'd never seen the child! She's been ours and she hasn't been. There's a secret John

knows and won't or can't share with me, though I've mothered her all these years and love her as if she were my very own. There's somebody in the world that claims a better right to her than I have, whom John must know about and yet keeps me in the dark. Hmm. Well. There shan't anybody say I haven't done my duty by the girl from the first day to the last; and if she's to leave me at a minute's notice, so to speak, I won't have her go without everything in order. Wednesday! My heart! I guess Martha, this'll be the very busiest week of your life and you've had some pretty busy ones already!"

But, presently, the good woman found herself contemplating with a certain pride that she was going to have a daughter educated in a fashionable school. That Dorothy was so much prettier, so much more clever than the neighboring girls that it was proper she should have greater advantages. That it would give herself an enviable pleasure to visit Miss Rhinelander's and be received in a state parlor and into the presence of aristocratic people, even though they might be as young as her Dolly. That it was a strange thing for somebody she didn't know to pay the girl's expenses; though she promptly settled it in her own mind that this "secret somebody" was Seth Winters himself. And, of course, they, her adopted parents, would pay him back as soon as the mine was developed more and "royalties" accrued, or the mineral water became more popular. So that when, on the evening before her departure from home, Dorothy came to her

mother, sad and anxious over the parting, she was met by the cheerful assurance:

"Why, child, there's nothing in the world to cry about. It isn't as if you were going to be kidnapped again, or lose yourself in empty barns, or any other such mischance. You're away most of every day, even now, with your running to the smithy for lessons — and queer sort of lessons, too! When I went to school we studied out of books and didn't go poking bugs out of barks of trees. We begun at the beginning of the spelling-book, 'a-b, ab'; 'd-o-g, dog', and went straight through to the back cover. And we wrote in copy books, not made up letters and stories out of our own heads and called that writing. It's a good thing for you you're going to get regular teaching. And John says you are to come home once in a while, for a half-day, or over a night; or something like that. Did I tell you I was going to have Alfaretta to live with us and help around the house? Well, I am. Soon as Mrs. Babcock heard the news she came straight across to find out all the details, and 'twas her offered to let Alfy come. She said the girl was set and determined she wouldn't go to that new school on south-side and was old enough to hire out and begin to earn her keep. I shan't pay her wages the first month. After that if she does well and proves steady I will. I like her. I always did like Alfaretta from that very first time she came here. Oh! we'll manage all right."

Poor Dorothy wasn't comforted by this cheerfulness.

She felt herself no longer of any account in her home and the very thought of the boarding school made her unhappy. A public day school, with mates of her own class in life, would be pleasant enough, but to be shut up all the time with a lot of wealthy strangers did not attract her.

Even Father John was cheerful now, though she didn't know that it was a light heartedness assumed to deceive her into a similar gayety; and altogether it wasn't the sort of home-leaving she would have pictured once.

Yet when on that Wednesday evening she found herself stranded in the great parlor of the Rhinelander establishment, and saw Seth Winters bow himself out — for it was he who had conveyed her hither — she felt that all the unhappiness of the past days was nothing in comparison of the loneliness that now overcame her. Tears sprang to her eyes but their fall was checked by a stern voice saying:

"Young gentlewomen do not show emotion in public, Miss Dorothy. If you will control yourself for a few moments I will conduct you to your apartment."

Dorothy looked up at the austere assistant teacher who had silently entered the room, and disliked her on the instant. This was a bad beginning of the new life and it was a most rebellious girl who followed her guide up several flights of stairs, through corridors that confused her by their sameness, until they stopped before a closed door bearing on its panels the words:

"Miss Dorothy. Room Thirteen."

"Miss Dorothy" hesitated, read and re-read the number, then recalled all the superstitions she had heard concerning it and flatly declared:

"I shan't take that room. You can give me another. My mother wouldn't let me. We never do anything with a 'thirteen' at our house, and I shall not begin here. I really shall not, cannot —."

But the teacher merely lifted her eyebrows, motioned the new pupil to enter, and — she did so. There was something about this Miss Greatorex which made disobedience impossible; and having done as she was bidden, poor Dorothy waited only till the lady had gone away, closing the door behind her, then threw herself on the narrow bed and burst into a passion of homesick tears.

CHAPTER IX

THE NEW HOME

Dorothy had cried herself quiet, yet she still lay on the bed, feeling too desolate and forsaken to move, when there came a tap at the door and a call from without:

"Miss Dorothy?"

For a moment she did not answer, then asked in turn:

"Well? Who wants me?"

"I do," said a pleasant voice which the girl at once perceived could not belong to Miss Greatorex. Then the door was gently pushed ajar and the same voice explained: "If you please, Miss, the dressing bell has rung and I was sent to help you get ready for dinner. That will be served at six o'clock."

Dorothy got up and admitted a white-capped and white-gowned maid whose uniform recalled that of the trained nurses at the hospital where she had been when father John was taken ill. The face beneath the cap was round and comely and the wide mouth had a trick of smiling that made its owner seem like sunshine to those who looked upon her. "Happy

Maggie" she was called by all her "young ladies" and never a nickname better bestowed. The new pupil's liking for her was as instant as her dislike of Miss Greatorex had been.

"Will it? But I'm already dressed, am I not? This was my Sunday frock at home and I had my dinner at twelve o'clock," she said standing still in the middle of the small room and observing the visitor's movements with curiosity.

The little trunk, brand new and marked with the initials "D. C.", was already in place, unstrapped, unlocked, and its cover lifted. Mr. Winters had carried its key and had given it to the servant who admitted him and his charge, which explained how it had been unfastened as soon as placed in Room Thirteen.

With deft, capable hands, "Happy Maggie" now promptly removed the clothing from the trunk, arranged the underwear in the bureau and hung the frocks in the wardrobe. She critically inspected the latter as she did so and without comment laid aside a white wool that Martha had considered a great extravagance when included in the list Miss Rhinelander had furnished.

"That's my party one, if they have any parties," said Dorothy.

"Yes, miss, but it's to be worn the night. So the mistress said. And if you'll be bathing a bit now I'll do your hair after and fasten your frock."

"Why — why! I always do my own hair and nobody need fasten my frock. I begin at the top, you

know, and button down as far as I can reach, then put my hands up from the bottom and fix the rest."

"Sure and it's a handy way to be raised, no doubt, miss. But here 'tis my part to assist my young ladies and the frock has no buttons, only hooks, which are bothersome some times."

As she finished removing the contents of the trunk she dragged it out into the corridor, touched an electric bell, and a porter appeared with a skid. A moment later he and the trunk had disappeared in the freight elevator and the resolution Dorothy had formed when put into "Thirteen," to "run away" was rendered useless. She wouldn't stay, oh! no. She knew her parents wouldn't wish her to if they understood what sort of a school this was, but neither could she go and leave all those new clothes behind her. Why, some of them hadn't even been tried on! They had been bought "by the size" and were to be altered if need be, if found not to fit.

Then almost before she knew it, Maggie had bathed her face and arms and had gently seated her in the chair before the narrow mirror. Here she brushed and curled the dark hair and tied the white bow at one side with a grace Dorothy herself could never have given it. A few moments later, with feet shod in spotless white, and garbed in the dainty frock, Dorothy was bidden:

"Look now, please, miss, and see if all is right. Are you comfortable everywhere? No pinching or pulling, or aught amiss with any of your clothes?

'Tis the 'perfect comfort gives the perfect ease,' Miss Rhinelander does be always telling me and bidding me take care about with my young ladies. Sure, 'tis a sweet face you have, miss, if only it were a bit less homesick and sorrowful. But 'twill pass. 'Twill pass real soon and then you'll be that happy! A fine place is Rhinelander Academy, and it's going on five year I've been biding in it.

"There. That's enough. I make too free with my tongue, at times. But I like young folks to be glad and I try to make them so, just by tellin' them the plain truth as I've seen it. And please, remember, miss, that I'm the maid for this floor, and you're to call on me whenever you want me for anything. If so be I'm engaged at the moment I'll answer your bell the next instant I'm free. See, here 'tis. You have but to touch it and it rings in my room."

"Oh! I know about electric bells, thank you. I've seen them in street cars and stores and places. What am I to do now, Maggie?"

"It's to dinner you'll go now, and ready just in time; for here comes Miss Greatorex to fetch you. I'll come to you again, miss, when the retiring bell rings and till then — good luck!"

It had been the chatter and service of a waiting maid only, but it had changed all Dorothy's feeling, so that she was able to meet Miss Greatorex with less reluctance, even with a winning smile, and the question:

"Have you come for me?"

The smile was ignored but the question was answered by a crisp:

"I have. Else I should not be here. Follow me. Mind the various turnings and stairways so that you will be able to find your own way next time. Keep your shoulders up and back, your stomach in, and carry yourself easily. Forget that your clothes are new and — here, please."

The lady had given Dorothy a comprehensive survey. She knew that her principals, the Misses Rhinelander, were extremely particular about the appearance and carriage of their pupils, the training in this respect beginning immediately upon arrival at the famous Academy. But the assistant, like many other subordinates, outranked her superiors in discipline, as Dorothy was later to discover.

In reality, there was nothing with which to find fault, or it would have been found. The girl had always been graceful, and even in her simplest attire had worn that manner which is called "style"— an intangible something which is more than grace and must be a gift of nature, since it can so rarely be acquired. Besides, she was not at all self-conscious, for she was so eager to observe all new things and people that she never thought about herself.

Therefore, it was a pleasing picture she now made as she followed her guide into the parlor where groups of other girls had assembled, awaiting the dinner announcement. She entered with a little sweeping curtsey, that came as naturally to her as the keen survey

she took of the room and its inmates. Some of these were a bit surprised by her salutation, and merely stared, but there were others who responded in turn, and one tall girl came promptly forward, saying:

"You are Miss Dorothy, I suppose. Miss Penelope told me you were coming, to-day, and I — we all are very happy to meet you. I am Elizabeth Marshall; and this is Molly Breckenridge;" she added, as a merry-faced junior skipped to her side and slipped her hand under the senior's arm.

Dorothy acknowledged the introduction as Mrs. Calvert had once instructed her, then she accepted the seat proffered her on the wide sofa beside Elizabeth, and gazed about her with great curiosity.

This was not the same apartment in which she had been received with Mr. Winters, but a smaller and cosier one. It was the "girls' own," as it was called, and she thought she had never seen so delightful a room. The walls were full of pictures, the windows of blooming plants and stately palms, and the soft coloring of all the luxurious furnishings formed an excellent background for the brightly garbed maidens who were scattered about the charming place. Electric light made all as vivid as day, and it was indeed a brilliant picture which half-dazzled Dorothy's unaccustomed eyes.

"How pretty it is!" she exclaimed; "and how lovely everybody looks! Is it a party?" she asked of the junior who was known as "Jolly Molly," and who had moved around to her other side and affection-

ately slipped her arm around the stranger's waist.

"Oh! dear, no! I wish it was! But it's just ordinary 'slumgudgeon' night. I'm glad you've come. I'm always glad of a 'newer' who may have some fun in her. Most of the 'olders' are so pokey. Miss Rhinelander makes such a point of 'high marks' and doing our 'noblest' that — that it's pretty hard on a girl, I think. Where's your home?"

Dorothy explained; then asked:

"What's a 'slumgudgeon night,' please? I never heard of one."

"You will now, then. Plenty of times. Once a week, on Mondays, forever, and ever, and ever. I hate to know beforehand always just what I'm going to have to eat; don't you?"

"Why, I never thought. I —"

But her remark wasn't finished, for at that moment the butler appeared at the entrance, pushing aside the rich portieres and announcing with great dignity:

"Young ladies, dinner is served."

He was a fine looking colored man, clad in the conventional evening clothes, and bearing himself as if the responsibilities of the entire establishment rested upon his square shoulders.

Instantly, there was a gentle rustle and movement among the many groups, which passed forward to the wide hall with a subdued eagerness. For high-bred as they might be they were still young and hungry humans with as keen an appetite for dinner as ever poor Peter Piper had. Oddly enough, at that moment there

rose before Dorothy's memory that scene in the old barn where she and the lad had literally devoured Mike Martin's stolen pig; and she smiled at the contrast.

There was no marching in procession at Miss Rhinelander's. By twos and threes, or singly, as they had happened to be grouped at the arrival of Albert, the butler, they left the parlor and entered the dining room. Here was a glitter of silver and glass, many small and perfectly arranged tables, and a corps of white-coated colored waiters, such as might have been found in a great hostelry; and to say that she was astonished scarcely expresses the amazement with which Dorothy regarded the scene. This a school? A mere boarding school? It wasn't at all like the stories she had read of such institutions. The appointments seemed even richer and more stately than those of the Montaignes, at the Towers, and far more so than at Bellvieu or Deerhurst — Mrs. Calvert's homes.

A teacher presided at each small table and, to her own regret, Dorothy was assigned to that of Miss Greatorex. Also, all the other girls at this table were strangers to her, and she looked longingly across to that near-by one where Molly sat in the primmest of attitudes yet winking continually.

Despite her feeling that she should not, Dorothy laughed. The other girls at her table seemed inclined to do so, too, but glanced toward Miss Greatorex and wisely refrained. Therefore the burden of that lady's reproof fell upon the newcomer's shoulders only:

"Miss Dorothy, giggling at table is exceedingly ill bred. It is not permissible here. Kindly, take your soup from the side of your spoon, and don't suck it in with that sort of noise."

"I didn't 'suck' it, and I did take it from the side, Miss Greatorex. Thank you, but I think — I think I know how to eat!"

At this audacious retort Dorothy's table-mates fairly gasped and the mistress's cheek flushed. However, she said nothing further, though during all that meal the stranger felt those sharp eyes scrutinizing and criticising her own every movement.

This didn't tend to her own ease or render more palatable the chief dish of the dinner — that which the pupils had named "slumgudgeon." This was a stew made up all the odds and ends of food left from other dinners and found in the larder; and Dorothy's introduction to the table at Rhinelander Academy made her recall those tales she had read of the scant provisions usually found at "boarding schools." Indeed, despite the great amount of "style" and formality practiced at this high-class Academy, its proprietors kept rather too closely to the maxim of "plain living and high thinking;" though, had they realized it there would have been more "high thinking" if their growing young folks had not so often been disturbed by unsatisfied appetites.

The dinner consisted of several courses, each most limited in portion, each most elegantly served, and ended with a tiny bit of dessert which Dorothy would

have been glad to despatch in two mouthfuls, had not the keen eye of Miss Greatorex been upon her.

Miss Rhinelander rose from the head table where only the most distinguished seniors sat and, at that signal, all the other teachers also rose. Then the company dispersed, and again in that informal way which suggested a private dinner-party rather than a rule-bound school; and once more back in the pretty parlor, Dorothy found herself surrounded by many of the pupils who seemed almost as glad to welcome her among them as "Jolly Molly" had been.

There, too, entered a lady whose arrival was the signal for a general outburst of delight.

"O, Miss Penelope, Miss Penelope! You dear, you dear!" cried one girl throwing her arms about the sweet-faced, gray-haired woman, the younger Miss Rhinelander, the real house-mother of the flock. "Now for a good time! What may we do? What shall we play?"

Miss Penelope returned the caress with a gentle one of her own, and answering: "Almost anything you choose, for a time," she crossed the room to where Dorothy stood, wide-eyed and watchful, laid her hand upon the girl's shoulder and said:

"Dear Dorothy, I am very glad to have you in our home. I know all about you, and Mrs. Betty Calvert is one of my dearest friends. I have known her all my life."

"Oh! have you? Then you must love her, as I do!" cried the girl, delighted and comforted to find

that her "fairy godmother" was no stranger here. It gave her a feeling of being at home herself, of "belonging," that fully offset the affect Miss Greatorex had had upon her.

"Blind man's buff!" suggested one girl, eagerly, and there was swift assent.

"I'll blind!" offered Molly, but was frowned down at once.

"Miss Penelope! Miss Penelope begins!" said another; and Dorothy watched in surprise how this lovely gentlewoman submitted to have the handkerchief tied about her eyes and entered into the spirit of the game with as much abandon as any youngster there.

It was playing "buff," and watching as each girl was captured, or came near being, that Dorothy learned the names of many of her new companions. Only a few seniors declined to share the sport and sat apart, watching a trifle scornfully the "antics" of their juniors; and these the new pupil saw were the same who had sat at the head table with the principal. They seemed to have imbibed something of her dignified bearing and hauteur and to consider themselves superior to the majority of their mates.

However, nobody among the players appeared to mind them in the least, and the game waxed fast and furious; till, suddenly, there was the sharp ring of a bell and a perfect silence succeeded the noise.

"Study hour. Oh! dear! It's like tumbling out of the skies into a cold cellar!" wailed Molly, yet in-

stantly left the room, as obedient to the summons as the gravest senior.

Miss Penelope quietly folded the handkerchief she had worn and bade Dorothy follow her.

"Miss Rhinelander, our principal, will examine you now so as to assign you your class and place."

The new scholar trembled. Nobody was better aware of her own shortcomings in the way of spelling and the "three R's" which Oliver Sands considered the foundation of all education. Nor did her trembling cease when she entered the private study of the famous teacher, and saw the pile of school books arrayed upon her desk.

Miss Penelope gave the girl an encouraging smile, yet herself glanced rather timidly toward her learned sister and asked, as she prepared to withdraw:

"Have you any further commands for me this evening, Miss Rhinelander?"

"None, Miss Penelope. You are at liberty until eight o'clock to-morrow morning."

The curtains dropped over the doorway and Dorothy stood alone in the august presence of her new instructor; who bore herself as if the wisdom of ages were in her white, pompadoured head, and who now regarded her new pupil with a stern expression, illy calculated to restore confidence to that trembling creature's breast.

"Miss Dorothy, you may be seated. I will begin your examination with reading. This book, this paragraph. Promptly, if you please."

Dorothy had never read aloud in a worse, more sing-song tone and was conscious of it. But the examiner made no comment as the book was laid aside, save to bid the reader spell any of the words from the same paragraph which she could recall.

Alas! Her memory here failed entirely, or was frightened out of her by the piercing black eyes behind Miss Rhinelander's spectacles.

"None? You can remember nothing? That proves a shocking want of observation on your part. It is a crime to go through the world unobservant of everything about you. I would suggest that your first study be observation — attention to detail and the like."

"Why — why — Mr. Winters used to say I had the keenest observation — almost as great as Jim Barlow's. He said —" began Dorothy, stung to self-defense, but ending lamely when she had progressed thus far.

"I have not the pleasure of Mr. Barlow's acquaintance and an eccentric farrier is hardly a fit judge of your attainments or characteristics," remarked the principal, coldly. She was not accustomed to her young ladies speaking their minds in her presence and considered that the new pupil was too bold and presumptuous.

All the orthodox branches were taken up and questioned upon. In almost all Dorothy ignominiously failed. She couldn't express herself clearly upon even the simplest subjects, with which she yet knew she

was perfectly familiar; but sitting there, revealing herself as an ignoramus, she fell to studying the fine, handsome face of her teacher with a curiosity that grew to real interest. The dark eyes behind the gleaming glasses, the snowy, piled-up hair, the regular features, and the calm, cold expression interested her and suggested a poem she had once read. So that, when she was given pencil and paper and bidden to show a specimen of her handwriting, she did so in these words:

"And they called her cold. God knows
Underneath the winter snows
The invisible hearts of flowers grow ripe for blossoming;
And the lives that seem so cold,
If their stories could be told,
Would seem cast in gentler mold, would be full of love and spring."

Miss Rhinelander took the paper, perused it, and gave a little start. A softness stole over her stern features, and with something like kindly interest she observed:

"Your chirography and your sentiment do you credit. In other studies you will have to begin at the bottom. Only, wait a moment. I'm requested to give your talent for music the fullest encouragement. Can you sing?"

"A little, Miss Rhinelander."

"Is there anything here that you know?" continued the lady, pointing to the little piano in the corner and the books in the rack beside it, as she herself sat down to play an accompaniment to the song.

A few Scotch ballads were among the loose sheets of music and these were Dorothy's familiars, beloved of her Father John. Her eye fell upon the song of "Caller Herrin'," and a memory of him, as she sung it to him only the night before, rose up and clutched her throat.

Father John! That dearest, bravest, tenderest of men! It was by his consent she was here — to do him credit! Well she would.

Miss Rhinelander touched the chords, nodded, and Dorothy sang. Not to the woman on the stool, not to any hope of commendation here, but to that absent and beloved father and all her heart was in her voice. When the song was ended there was a moment's silence. Then with real pleasure the principal said:

"Your forte will be music. You need great training but if you choose you can do well with that voice. Good night. Miss Greatorex has come to show you the way to your room once more. After this you will depend upon yourself. It is an opportunity to train your observation in which you are so deficient. Good night, Miss Greatorex. Good night, Miss Dorothy."

So in a mingled mood of dismay and satisfaction, Dorothy ascended once more to her little white bedroom, so spotless and so bare. There was nothing here

of the luxurious appointments of the rooms below; only the few necessary furnishings, selected with strict regard to health and hygiene; but the bare place was again brightened by the smiling presence of "Happy Maggie," waiting to see her safe in bed.

Dorothy meant to be dreadfully homesick and to lie long awake contemplating her own misery. Instead she went straight to sleep; and was in the midst of a dream wherein she was playing "blind man's buff" to the tune of "Old Lang Syne" and could catch nobody but Peter Piper with a greasy little pig upon his shoulder; when from this dream she was aroused by a startling sound and sprang up, too frightened to comprehend where she was or what had happened.

CHAPTER X

BUTTERCUP AND CLYTIE

MIKE MARTIN was not arrested and sent to the House of Correction, nor did his father any longer care about the theft of the baskets of nuts, and the subsequent pilfering of Bridget's larder.

There was trouble more serious than this upon the mountain, both south-side and north-side living in fear. Diphtheria had broken out in the further hamlet and the new schoolhouse was emptied of its scholars. Even the younger Babcocks, who had been transferred to Dominie Wilmot's charge and who were so healthy they had small opinion of contagion, enjoyed the present condition of things by playing "hookey" on every day when their mother despatched them school-wards.

Neighbors refrained from visiting neighbors and the "board of health doctor" with his yellow flag to tack upon their doors was the one dread of all.

"Mike Martin's down with the dipthery! He's got it awful bad. They've put the other children to stay in their barn, only Molly and she's gone to her aunt's. There mustn't anybody go nigher than the length of the lane, just to ask how he does and to

leave things for him. But 'tis little he eats or ever will again, I reckon;" said Bill Barry, reining up at Oliver Sands's gate, to "pass the time of day," and, incidentally, to negotiate a "hoss trade."

"The diphtheria? Impossible. They're a shiftless lot, the Martins, but to go and import that disease — they wouldn't dare. Thee must be mistaken, friend William," remonstrated the miller, thinking of the little grandson visiting him at that time and whom he loved best of all his family. "Thee must be mistaken. Only a day or two ago I was there and the child with me. I — Thee surely has heard some tale without foundation. Why, the man has got to move at the end of the month and I can't have that house infected. I've agreed to let it to — No, no. Thee is misinformed."

Billy Barry shook his head and glanced at the little lad playing on the wide lawn. A pretty child that; still no prettier and no dearer than the children of other folk, and just as liable to illness as they. Then he proposed the "swop" he had in mind, but was cut so short by the miller that he simply "Gid-daped!" to his nag and went back to "Lower Village" to report his news.

Peter had again disappeared. He had not been seen since that day when Dorothy had escaped from the old barn, promising to send somebody back with a wagon to convey him to Skyrie.

Jim Barlow had taken Portia and the phaeton and gone upon that errand, but fruitlessly. All the trace

that Peter had left of his late occupancy was a pile of well-picked pig-bones and a scrap of Dorothy's gingham frock, and Seth Winters knew that further search would be equally vain. Until the half-wit chose to reappear he would not again be seen. A rumor came that he *had* been seen in somebody's farm wagon, riding toward Newburgh; but as many teamsters gave the lad a lift nobody could specify this especial one and, save Seth, nobody cared enough to investigate.

Other changes came. Hardly had Dorothy been settled at the Rhinelander Academy than the blacksmith received an imperative summons to the south, where his real business interests lay and where was the scene of his greatest charities.

His departure was almost as sudden as Dorothy's had been; and when Jim Barlow stood on the railway platform watching the disappearing train that carried his old "master" away, he felt as if the earth had sunk beneath his feet.

"'The best laid plans of mice and men gang aft aglee,'" he quoted, with a sharp regret in his faithful soul. "There was everything all planned. The 'Learned Blacksmith' was to school-keep for the lot of us. We were to have the finest teaching in the world and the best times. Dorothy — oh! dear! She's gone, he's gone, nothing and nobody left but Owney Bryan and Mr. Winters's books. Well! They're everything to me, almost, and master or no master I've got to get an education, whether or no.

There isn't much to be done at Deerhurst now and I can get a power of time to study, seems if. I haven't a mite o' right to complain, not a mite; seein' I never was so well fixed out for learnin', and Seth did say I was makin' regular strides in my books. I talk a heap better'n I did, I know that myself, just rememberin' what a fool feller I was when I lived at Miranda Stott's truck farm. Seems as that boy and me were two different ones; but — but to-day, I feel 'bout as lonesome as that other boy did. Ho, hum! Dorothy's gone to a top-notch sort of a school, and 'll soon be learnin' all kinds of things that are spelled with capital letters. But she shan't outdo me. She shall not. She had a pretty consid'able of a start, first off, but I'll catch up and forge ahead! See if I don't!" and cracking his whip at some imaginary obstacle, James chirruped to the horse he had driven to the station, conveying Mr. Winters thither, and started back up the mountain.

How all these changes affected the mountain cottage and its inmates is easily told. In presence of the dread disease that was scourging their mountain, both its master and mistress were thankful that Dorothy was away and in safer quarters.

They missed her, indeed, and father John far more than his wife. Yet the sunny-natured, and most capable Alfaretta gave them scant leisure for repining. She whisked about the house like a small whirlwind, enjoying the conveniences of the cottage as great luxuries, and declaring again and again that:

"I druther wash dishes 'an not, when there's such a few of 'em! I would so. And as for our little bit o' wash, why I could do that with one hand and hang the clothes out with the other. I hain't been brought up lazy, I hain't. And I'd admire to be learnt to sew nice as you can, Mis' Martha. That's the one thing Ma Babcock hates, though she does do it after her fashion. Course. Else how'd she ever keep clothes on such a power of children as she has? School? Well, I don't mind givin' that up. Most I cared about goin' to Seth's for was to be along with Dolly. Now she's gone and left us — Pshaw! who cares? As for old Job Wilmot I wouldn't send even Lady Rosalind to him, I wouldn't!" she concluded, picking up the kitten and caressing it for its absent mistress's sake.

No; there wasn't much time for brooding in a house where Alfaretta Babcock dwelt. Nor was it long before she made herself as necessary to Father John as she promptly became to his good wife.

It was she who always saw that his crutches were near at hand; that his slippers were ready for his tired feet; that his desk was cleared of useless litter and made tidy for his constant writing. She even assumed, unforbidden, the watering of the young rose-bushes; though, at first, to see her handling Dorothy's new and cherished sprinkler sent a feeling of annoyance through his mind. However, Martha's opinion in the case was the wise one:

"Make Dolly feel a deal worse to come home some Saturday and see the plants all dead for want of care

than to have Alfy do for them. As for you, since Peter Piper's deserted us, I guess you've more than got your hands full."

And on another night she said:

"If one door gets shut another gets open. Peter's left but Mrs. Smith's offered me her Littlejohn to work for his board durin' the winter to come. He's steadier than Peter ever was and his folks are glad to spare him. He's always done the biggest share of the chores at home and they want to train that Dan of theirs to work more. All for fun and tom-foolery, Daniel is, and it's time it's took out of him. Mr. Smith, he thinks that the only way to make a man out of a boy is to keep his nose close to the grindstone. So I said we'd take him and I shall give him that little attic chamber where I hid that paper we lost. Oh! If that could be found! I'd be real happy and content.

"Course, if you were well again, John dear. But you aren't gettin' any lamer, are you? And your appetite — Well, that might be better. Still I say, like my own mother used to, 'Stay good trouble lest worse trouble come.' How soon do you s'pose it'll be safe for Dorothy to come and spend the Saturday, John?"

"Not for a long time, Martha. Not for a long time, I fear."

The lonely man sighed again, in longing for that bright young creature who had made his greatest happiness for so many years, and whose presence in

his home was already half-forgotten by his less thoughtful wife.

And, while all these changes and troubles were visiting her beloved mountain, how fared she?

The sound which had startled her from her dream was nothing but the second rising bell, and the brisk knocking of a firm hand upon the door. Then the door opened and the smiling Maggie came in.

"Sure, Miss Dorothy, it was over-sleeping you were, and no wonder, so new to the place as you are. Well, well, well. 'Tis haste we must be makin' now, and the bath is all ready this minute. This way, if you please."

Dorothy rubbed her eyes, laughed, and followed. With the morning's sunshine had come happier feelings to herself, and she was already forming brave plans for study and progress, even though but just awake.

Maggie explained:

"On this floor there's a separate room for two young ladies, with a bath betwixt the pair. 'Tis a 'sweet' they call it and only the richest pupils has it. For the others there's double rooms, with single beds, and a bath for a half-dozen, maybe. This top floor of all is the prettiest I think. See? From the window what a fine view of the grand Hudson river and the mountains that line it? The Highlands they call 'em, and maybe — Was you ever in this place before, miss?"

All this while Maggie was assisting her new "young

lady" to disrobe and bathe, an assistance that embarrassed its recipient to that degree she presently exclaimed:

"Dear, kind Maggie! If you would just please turn your back for five minutes! I'm used to bathing myself, course. Ever since I was the tiniest little tacker. And this little bath-room is ever so like our own old one in Brown street. And was I ever in this place? I've been in the town, course; and I live, my home is on that mountain just — Oh! maybe I can see it from the window, maybe!"

But she was now alone as she had requested. Maggie was a busy person and had already returned to the little chamber and was making up the bed. Dorothy made haste to follow her thither and wondered at the deftness of the other, who made not one false or wasted movement and who accomplished so much in such a little while.

It was odd, perhaps, that the girl's first lesson at this new and aristocratic school should have been learned from the humblest member of its staff — if to the "staff" a waiting-maid may be ascribed. But a better lesson she could have studied from no printed book! since its moral was quickness, neatness, punctuality, and good temper.

For even while she freshly brushed "Miss Dorothy's" hair, and against that "young lady's" protest, came sharp rings at an electric bell somewhere near, and repeated calls from various voices:

"Oh, why isn't Maggie here?"

"Maggie! Oh! Maggie! Can't you come? I'm late and —"

"Maggie! Where did you put my clean shirt-waist? I can't find —"

"In the top dresser drawer, Miss Norah!" "Sure, I'll be with you the next minute ever was!" and "Didn't hear the bell, Miss Molly? Listen to that child, and 'twas after wakin' her the third time I was the mornin'. There, miss, that'll do fine. Now 'twould be best you went below. Follow the other young ladies you will see. All roads lead to the breakfast room at this time of day and you can't mistake. Besides, 'twill stand you in the principal's good graces to be prompt to the meal."

With that "Happy Maggie" vanished, and Dorothy closed her door, to kneel for a moment beside her little white bed and ask God's guidance in this new, strange life.

Then she started below and seeing Miss Greatorex hovering in the distance, like some dark bird of prey ready to pounce upon the nearest victim, she veered aside and ran to join Molly Breckenridge, who was hurrying down the corridor, buttoning her waist as she went, and looking very different in her careless morning attire from the radiant girl of the evening before.

However, she welcomed Dorothy pleasantly, and with an instant demand upon her services.

"O, child! Do tie my ribbons. Could you button my shoes? It's so provoking that we can't wear our

bedrooms down to breakfast, isn't it? How neat you are! But I suppose that hateful Maggie went to you first. She always does to the 'newers' before anybody else. Looking for bigger tips, I reckon. She knows well enough that none of us 'olders' have a cent left by the end of the month, and we pinched down to the limit of a quarter a week! Think of it! Why you can't buy a decent box of candy for only a quarter! And our fathers millionaires!"

This was like so much Greek to Dorothy, who asked in amazement:

"How in the world could anybody wear a bedroom? and what's a tip?"

This innocence, or ignorance, was equally amazing to Molly, who nearly fell off the stair by reason of her staring at her new friend instead of looking where she trod.

"'Bedrooms' are our soft slippers, course; and wherever have you lived that you ask what 'tips' are, goosey?"

Dorothy laughed. She didn't mind being called a "goose" since it was in that affectionate tone; and already between her and this harum-scarum junior had arisen a sincere liking. They were both frank and truthful, they both loved fun, and they were of the same age. Dorothy did not then know that Molly's preferences were apt to be short-lived; and that she would commonly make great friends with each "newer" only to cast that temporary favorite aside upon the arrival of some other stranger pupil.

And those more experienced girls who now saw this pair together nudged one another and glanced significantly upon them; while Elizabeth Marshall remarked loud enough for Dorothy to hear and for her especial benefit:

"Jolly Molly's at her old tricks, I see. Wonder how long this new infatuation will last!"

But though the remark was heard it conveyed no intelligence to the stranger, who slipped her arm lovingly about Molly's shoulders and smiled in that winning way which gained her so many friends.

"You're a dear! Just a regular dear! I'm so glad you've come! I say will you be my 'chum'?" demanded Molly, pausing on the bottom step to enthusiastically hug Dorothy, and thereby getting in the way of other descending pupils, bound breakfast-ward.

"Indeed I will! I just love you, too! I shall never forget that you were the first girl here to welcome me, except that stately Elizabeth Marshall. She was kind, too, course; but as if she were high up above me and out of pity stooped to give me a pull upwards. Oh! dear! I — I believe she heard me!" ended Dorothy, in some dismay.

"Surely she did! See that head of hers tossed upward? Well, who cares. She's the probable honor girl — first honor — and this is her last year. She won't have much use for you, a beginner, but did the courtesy act as she's been trained. That's all her speaking to you meant, last night. Oh! dear! Hurry, hurry! We're the very last and I've had three

demerits this week already! If I get another I lose my allowance and I owe nearly every girl in my class. Do hurry!"

Like a flash Molly slipped away, leaving Dorothy to make her entrance alone and rather awkwardly. It seemed like magic that all the girls thronging the halls as she descended should have already taken their places behind their chairs; and it did not tend to her composure to have so many pairs of eyes turn her way and regard her curiously.

Wondering why they all remained standing she tripped forward over the oiled floor, caught her toe in a corner of the rug and fell sprawling at Miss Greatorex's side. The expression of that lady's countenance as the blunderer regained her feet sent a fresh chill through Dorothy's heart but a crimson flood to her cheek, which deepened as the teacher bowed to Miss Rhinelander at the head table and gravely announced:

"Madam President, we are ready."

Instantly every head was bowed and Miss Rhinelander said grace. Then as an attendant drew her chair back there was a simultaneous movement of every other chair in the room, a concerted seating of the many pupils, and breakfast was on.

There was a course of sour oranges or grape fruit cut in half and served with a little pointed spoon, and Dorothy felt Miss Greatorex observing her, looking out for a fresh awkwardness. But how to partake of such fruits in a dainty manner had been another

of the lessons learned from Mrs. Calvert, and the new pupil outdid her mates in that matter. There were various kinds of cereals, plenty of bread and butter, a glass of milk for those who desired it, but nothing else.

Dorothy waited in vain for her accustomed cup of coffee, but it was not forthcoming, nor did even Miss Greatorex enjoy that luxury; and that morning our heroine rose from table almost as hungry as when she sat down. But she observed that all the tables were served alike and that nobody seemed to expect anything different. It was her misfortune that she did not care for cereals, else her case might have been otherwise; and this was another lesson she learned in this new school. Also, it was a wise one, probably, since it was the proud boast of the Misses Rhinelander that during all the years of their Academy they had had few illnesses among their pupils and never a death.

So began the first day; described thus minutely only because all other days which followed seemed but its counterpart. The relaxation of rules at the six o'clock dinner hour had its purpose; to develop in these young ladies the habit of dining in state, or as guests of the wealthy homes to which they belonged. But no rules could be more strict, nor rigidly enforced, than those which regulated all the rest of the day.

Even exercise was taken by rule. A resident trained nurse kept her finger on the pulse of the school, so to speak, and prescribed for each pupil the length and

frequency of her walks, drives, or horseback recreation. To Dorothy's delight she found herself assigned to the riding class, with a spirited little mount and suitable habit already provided. To whose generosity she owed this pleasure she did not know; and vaguely wondered if it were to the same unknown friend who had paid miller Sands's mortgage. This friend might be Seth Winters, as her mother supposed, but she did not think so, and all her teasing questions concerning the matter had elicited no further information from him than the reply:

"My dear Dolly, why' can't you accept the good that comes to you without all this curiosity? I assure you that it is yours by ever right; therefore don't bother your small head with 'whys' and 'wherefores' but just be content and care-free as a little maid should be."

So, at that, she had flung her arms about the farrier's neck and kissed him, laughing and declaring that:

"Never again will I poke into things that haven't been confided to me. Don't you worry! I'll just believe that you, or somebody who loves me, is being good to me, sending me to that fine school and although I'd rather, so much rather, have stayed right here with you. Never mind! The better the education the quicker I'll be fitted for a school-ma'am myself and earning money for my father and mother. 'Cause I don't believe that old mine will ever, ever make them rich. Do you?"

But again the farrier warned her that she was

meddling in grown-ups' affairs, and forgetting that, for the present, all that was required of her was to be good and studious and happy — happy — as one of her age should be.

So she questioned no more and showed no surprise when Buttercup was brought round to the horse-block and exhibited to her as the one her "guardians" had placed in the Academy stables for her use. And such a happy girl she was as, equipped with as fine an outfit as any girl in the riding class, she was swung up to her saddle and started for her first ride with all these other well-mounted maidens.

There were twenty or more of them in the class and it was a matter of interest to the townsfolk to see them canter through the Academy gateway and along the broad boulevard into the open country beyond. Two riding masters with their grooms formed escort and looked after the safety of the young horsewomen, and to one of these guides Dorothy was especially entrusted on that first outing with the class.

However, she gave him little to do. She had practiced much, if not wisely, on pretty Portia and knew no fear. Buttercup was gentle, if swift, and easily guided by her tender mouth; and after a little time the creature forged ahead of the other equestriennes and came to the fore, where "Jolly Molly" always rode. She, too, was a born horsewoman, bred to the saddle from her babyhood, and young though she was had often ridden to hounds when at home in the south.

This day, as Dorothy came up to her, she almost screamed in her delight:

"Oh! good, good, good! I'm so glad — so glad you aren't a 'fraid cat.' All the class ride pretty well but never can forget that they're 'Rhinelanders,' on parade! Not one has a bit of dare in her and — Come on! Let's give those masters a race for their money!"

Dorothy was nothing loath. They were both wild with youth and health and their freedom from the watchful eyes of teachers. Close behind they could ear the clattering of the head master's horse, and with a swish of her crop Molly touched the tender skins of both Buttercup and Clytie— sending the high-bred creatures ahead over the now rough road at a reckless pace.

There was nobody near enough to warn them that just around the turn a bridge was down and the highway barricaded by a rude fence. Nor even had the warning come might they have been able to check their mounts in time. In any case they did not, for Clytie who was trained to the hurdle took the fence at a leap and landed in the gully below, tossing her rider aside like a feather. Then Buttercup, whose gentle temper had been unduly fretted by several days in stable felt she must follow Clytie; for after the briefest hesitation, the brown mare sprang after the black one, and landed on her knees beside the motionless Molly.

Unhurt, Dorothy slipped off. A marvel it seemed

that her own neck had not been broken, and she shut her eyes in terror after one glance at the prostrate little figure now lying huddled and seemingly dead on the muddy bank.

Yet she opened them again in a fresh fright as a hoarse voice cried from somewhere near:

"Why — why — Dolly!"

CHAPTER XI

FANCIES AND FACTS

"WHO calls me 'Dolly'— here?"

There was a rustling in the dead branches and Peter Piper's feather-adorned cap came into view. Never a sight more welcome.

"O, Peter-boy! How fortunate! Help me to lift poor Molly — and don't let that Buttercup stray off! Hurry — help!"

The lad had crept out from a laborer's hut, one of the rude shelters put up for temporary use of the bridge builders, and his jean overalls were mud stained as if he, also, had been toiling in that trench. He came quickly forward and a stalwart Irishman followed him.

"Arrah musha! What's this — what's this! Is it dead she be, the little colleen? And what for no should be afther leapin' the rails, that gait?" cried the latter, as with pitying tenderness he stooped over the prostrate Molly and turned her face to the light.

The movement hurt her and a sharp pain restored her consciousness and made her cry out:

"Ouch!"

Dorothy had never heard a sweeter sound, and was

down on her knees in an instant, crying and laughing both at once and between sobs, murmuring:

"Then you aren't killed! I am so glad — I am so glad!"

"Try, mavourneen! Can ye stand the bein' lifted til your feet?"

Molly looked up into the Irishman's face and then around her in perplexity, till her glance falling upon Clytie, calmly nibbling at a bit of herbage, recalled everything and roused her instant anger against her pet. To the others there could be no better evidence that she was not seriously injured than her sharp reproof to the horse.

"You horrid creature! How dared you throw me? Haven't we taken many higher leaps than that and did you ever do it before! What — what would your master, what would my — my father say?"

And at the memory of that idolized parent, the half-orphaned girl began to weep hysterically.

Dorothy's arms were around her at once and she tried to comfort by tender, pitying words, with the result that Molly cried the faster and also began to laugh in a curious way that was more distressing to the other girl than the fierce sobs had been.

"L'ave that!" ordered Brian Macarty, with sudden sharpness, and the hysterics instantly gave place to sheer amazement that any such person should dare so address a young lady, one of the "Rhinelanders," besides.

But the man was wise. Here was trouble and no

time to "fool." He and Peter, his temporary assistant had been taking a moment's rest in the tool shanty, awaiting the arrival of some other workmen with needed materials. There was only one way out of that gully, a long roundabout following of the stream till they should come to a sort of ford, where ascent to the road above might safely be made.

Even to ride a horse through the ravine was almost impossible; and after a brief survey of the situation, and despite the shriek of pain which her dislocated shoulder gave her, the strong fellow lifted the slight girl in his arms and strode rapidly forward — as rapidly as his burden and the stones permitted. Often he stepped down into the water but paid no heed to that; nor did he bother about the two horses.

Clytie, indeed, needed no guidance. She had been trained to follow her mistress wherever she led and did so now without hesitation, setting her little hoofs daintily between rocks and ripples with a deftness that aroused Dorothy's admiration. Buttercup was not so clever, but having once been bidden to "lead her," Peter did so, bringing up the rear of the little party with many a fall and stumble.

As for the rest of the class they were powerless to help in this emergency. The head master had seen the sudden turn the two girls had made and had followed them, himself unknowing of the broken bridge till he came to the rails and reined up just in time.

Then he had wheeled around and started back for another road that would lead into the ravine by the

same ford which Brian sought. There he and his company waited and received the runaways, Molly making a disgusted *mouê* as the Irishman at last set her upon her feet, pulled his forelock, and started back over the road he had come.

Yet he was not allowed to depart without a protest; Dorothy catching hold of his sleeve and begging:

"Tell us your name, you good man. We thank you, oh! so much! but we will want to pay you for your trouble. Tell —"

She wasn't prepared for the flush that rose to the man's swarthy cheek nor the pride with which he answered in his Irish brogue that: "Sure a man's a man, do he handle a pick or no! And 'twould be less nor a man would kape back his hand from helpin' a poor colleen like yon, account of a bit dirty silver! The top of the mornin' to yez all, with a bit advice to 'look where you lape' come next time."

Upon that he disappeared and Dorothy felt herself reproved for estimating a man's pride by his clothes. Then she turned to Peter, still holding Buttercup's bridle, and said:

"You can go, too, Peter Piper. I haven't anything to give you now but if you will go to our farm, Father John will do what I'd like to for me. Do go home, laddie; they'll all be so glad to see you."

Then she put her foot into the master's waiting palm and was helped to her saddle again. Molly, also, declared she was perfectly able to ride, because Clytie needed no guiding and she wanted to get home as

quickly as possible without waiting for a carriage to be sent.

So the whole party formed into line again and much more quietly than they had set out returned to the Academy and passed between its great iron gates. In every mind was the thought of a tragedy but just escaped, and every eye rested soberly upon the slender figures of "Dolly and Molly"— as the pair were always thereafter to be called by their mates — riding at the head of the procession, the head master between them, his hand upon the bridle rein of each, his own mount unguided.

Back at the ford, Peter Piper watched the cavalcade file away. To him it seemed almost like a circus parade, with his beloved Dorothy as star performer. A dull pleasure was in his clouded mind that he had been just on the spot where she had needed him; and her reappearance in his life changed all his present plans. He wouldn't go back to the shanty and Brian. He had been glad enough of the job, with its scant wages and food but a fairly good shelter above his head on these early winter nights. He had wandered far and long since that night in the old barn, when Dorothy had ministered to his sufferings and had left him to "send somebody." He didn't remember very clearly just where or how he had been. His foot was well. Somebody had given him a pair of old shoes and Brian had furnished him with a secondhand set of blue jeans. He had a dim idea that he ought to go back long enough to return the jeans to his

Irish friend, yet if he did — might he not be kept against his will?

No. He wouldn't go back. He would follow Dorothy. He belonged to her. He was her "Shadow," he'd heard the mountain people say, and shadows "belonged." The shadow of the fence yonder — why it never was far from the fence. First on one side, then the other, he'd noticed it often — that strange thing about shadows — how they kept close and forever to the object that owned them. Dorothy owned him. She had bought him one day, long, long ago, at a picnic, with a delicious loaf of cake. He hadn't been bidden to the picnic, he remembered, till she bade him; and after that began a new and happier life for him. Until that terrible day of the burning woods.

The woods were like the fat-voiced miller, which always made poor Peter think of bread well spread with butter — none too fresh! The miller and the woods and one wrong thing he had done. Two wrong things, maybe, but he couldn't rightly tell. He never could get things quite clear in his brain, as other people did. He knew he was different and he wondered why. But Dorothy could! Ah! yes! There was nobody in all the world so sweet, so clever, so altogether lovely as the girl to whom he was the "Shadow." He would follow her. It was the only thing to do. Then he would find out why she was in this strange company, away from Father John and Mother Martha and the kind blacksmith. She *was*

away from them all and she had needed *him.* She might need him again. If she did he would be on hand, close at hand.

Peter had not paused to let all these thoughts pass through his mind. He had thought them as he hurried along the road, following the horse-back party which now moved so sedately that his rapid gait kept them well in sight; so that when they entered the Academy grounds he was almost close upon them. He was fully in time to see them all dismount and their horses being led over the driveway to the handsome stables at the rear. He watched Dorothy spring down, unaided, and saw the look of reproof bestowed upon her by the master, who preferred a more dignified descent, since Miss Rhinelander had herself come to the door, surprised by this unexpected return before the regulated time.

Then he saw that other girl, whom Dorothy had kissed and cried over, carried gently within, and presently the great doors close. From the shrubbery where he had hidden, he made his way behind a row of mighty spruces that were the glory of the place and whose branches swept the ground, and thence to a little outbuilding whose door was half open. The spruces hid this also, from sight of the big house, where only pleasing views were permitted. It seemed to have been some sort of summer kitchen, for there were a few utensils left to rust within it and in one corner was a canvas cot. To Peter Piper the whole place seemed a paradise of comfort and security. His

propensity to hide was always strong upon him and never stronger than now, when he felt in some dim way that his presence here would be displeasing to his idol and those about her.

Yet he must stay. He would. He had something to do, to give her — sometime — sometime.

With this fresh thought the lad carefully pushed the sliding door into place, sat down upon the cot, and pulled from the breast of his blouse a small, very soiled leather bag. He had found it once in the ash-heap at the Towers and had begged a needle and thread of Mrs. Chester, with which to mend it. He carried it always; and the few articles he cherished most were bestowed within it. Turning it over and about for some few seconds he returned it to his pocket and lay down upon the cot. He had neither blanket nor pillow and cared for none. The cot was far softer than the ground or the rude bunk in the tool-shanty. His clothes were warmer than any he had had since he left the mountain smithy; and as for a light, were there not the stars shining through the little window? So, with a sigh of utter content, with no foreboding for the morrow, the poor "natural"— the "touched of God"— sank into a dreamless sleep.

Molly went promptly into Miss Penelope's pleasant "hospital"; so called since any case of trifling illness was settled there for readier recovery. But she went under protest and with the petition that Dorothy who had shared her adventure should also share her isolation, as far as might be; and, imagining that the new

pupil would understand that this was a proper punishment, Miss Rhinelander consented.

For a few days, till Molly's shoulder was pronounced well, the two girls spent all their time, except during recitations, in this pleasant room, where dear Miss Penelope moved in and out, full of patience and motherly kindness, yet with almost ceaseless demands upon her time and strength. It seemed odd to Dorothy to hear the lady always speak of her sister, the principal, as "Miss Rhinelander," and that the elder woman should call the younger "Miss Penelope," as if she were a stranger. But there were many "odd" regulations about the Academy, such as "no speaking aloud in the halls," "no conversation during study hours," and "perfect silence after retiring bell." To one of Dolly's glib tongue such rules seemed only made for her to break; and her heart sank over the numerous demerits the all-too-watchful Miss Greatorex imposed upon her weekly record.

Said Molly, one morning, when the rain was beating against the windows and even the nice "hospital" seemed dark and forlorn:

"Dolly mine, will you lend me fifty cents?"

"Fif—ty — cents! Why — why I haven't one, let alone fifty!" almost gasped the astonished girl.

"Why not? Have you spent anything in all the weeks you've been here?"

"No, indeed. I haven't had anything to spend. If there was any — any money — due me, the 'Grater' has offset it with bad marks. But I don't know as

there's been. And I ought to be ashamed of calling my teacher that name. I caught it from you, bad child! But I won't follow your example again if I can help it!" cried Dorothy, swooping down upon her "chum" and giving her a hug that produced the result of an impatient:

"Ouch! Don't you do that again! You hurt my shoulder!"

"Oh! I'm sorry. I didn't mean — I forgot. Forgive me, please."

"Course. Well, you can get money if you want it, can't you? Your folks live so near. I wish you'd write to them and ask for some — you might as well make it ten dollars and we needn't give an account of it to the Prex. Just a personal affair between us two. I'll repay all I use of it as soon as I can get it from Papa. Trouble is with me, though, that all my letters have to go through Miss Rhinelander's hands, so she'd find out if I wrote now. At the holidays — Goody! they're coming soon! — At the holidays I shall have plenty, and then 'twill be all right. We're allowed any amount our parents choose to give us for Christmas gifts and so on. But, Dolly precious, I'm just positively suffering — SUFFERING — do you hear? for a box of apricot marshmallows or nougat.

"There's a lot of note paper on the desk yonder and you just write right away. I'll coax 'Happy Maggie' to post the letter in the servants' box, that's never inspected — lots of the girls use it, unknown to the teachers — and it'll be all right. If your father

lives so near here he ought to get the letter to-morrow; and — Oh! dear! Can I possibly wait until to-morrow for those marshmallows?"

But Dorothy made no movement toward obeying her friend, even though this was recreation hour and she at liberty to do as she chose for a brief while. She was simply gazing at Molly Breckenridge in an amused and amazed fashion that provoked that young person to inquire:

"Well, Dolly Doodles, why that look of profound curiosity? as if I were a chimpanzee, or some other unfamiliar animal? and why don't you hurry up and write? It's no fun to be penniless, with our father's so rich! The only child of a millionaire fairly languishing for a few sweeties! Contemplate the fact and let me tell you I wouldn't bother you to do the asking if it didn't hurt me to hold a pen. Don't see why it had to be my right, instead of my left, shoulder that got twisted. Girlie — write. I'll dictate — this way:

"My very dear though unknown Sir :—

"Will you befriend a suffering fellow 'creature'— 'creature' always sounds pathetic, you know —' and lend me the modest sum of ten dollars? Not in a check that I couldn't get cashed but in nice easy one-dollar bills, or even small change, such as Dad calls 'chicken-feed' when he fills his pocket with it, going on a tour and for 'tips.' Any sort of money that a girl, two girls who've fallen over a precipice and been im — immured in hospital (immured sounds well and

touching, too) that these impoverished maidens can — can negotiate. Shall I say negotiate? That's what men and bank presidents and railway directors always say when they're getting a big loan.

"Oh! bother! I'm not used to having a private secretary, or amanuensis, or anybody like that. Don't be a goose. Hurry up and write your own kind of a letter to your own father and get the ten dollars quick-as-a-wink!"

But yet Dorothy didn't comply with Molly's demand. She still sat and regarded her friend with a puzzled expression, which finally was voiced in the question:

"Molly Breckenridge, whatever made you think my Father John was rich? Rich enough to lend or give either of us ten dollars? Ten — whole — dollars! That's a terrible big sum."

"Why — why — I don't know. But of course he is, else you wouldn't be here. Nobody comes to Rhinelander Academy who isn't an heiress, or is going to be. The Prex won't take any other kind of girl. She calls herself an American, but she's mighty proud of her old Dutch descent, and as exclusive almost as — as the Queen of England. That's one why. Another is that you're so simple yet so horribly stylish. I don't believe your clothes have cost half as much as mine, yet you look just right in them and I never do. My Aunt Lucretia buys my things. She gets a lot of them when she goes over to Paris every year. But Elizabeth Marshall says that the simplicity of

your frocks and the way you wear them shows that you're a genuine blue-blood. We're blue-blooded ourselves, we Breckenridges; belong to the F. F. V-s. We —"

"What's an 'F. F. V.?'" demanded Dorothy, whose practice of "observation," so recommended by her instructors, allowed nothing to pass.

"First Families of Virginia; the proudest, top-loftiest lot of people in the States. That's why I'm so reserved and difficult!" laughed the merry girl. "*Now*, are you going to write?"

"No, I am not. And I'm going to set you, and all the other girls, right about myself. I am not an heiress. I never shall be — for there is nobody for me to inherit from. I do not even own a *name* — a rightful surname. I was a foundling. I was found on a doorstep when I was a year-old baby. There was a card fastened to my clothes and it said my name was 'Dorothy C.' No more, no less. My 'Father John' was a letter-carrier in Baltimore, but he took me in and gave me my dear home and has been all, all, that my own natural father could have been.

"Then, after awhile, he grew lame. He had to lose his position, he had to come to the mountain farm to live and get well — if he could. They've discovered a mineral spring and an iron mine on that farm and sometime my people may be rich. But they aren't now; and I would as soon think of asking father for ten dollars as for a thousand. He couldn't give me either. That's why I cannot write

your letter. One why. The other is that we've no business to do behind our teachers' backs what we wouldn't before their faces. I'm sorry to disappoint you but —"

Poor Dorothy paused and dropped her head. It hadn't been an easy revelation to make. She knew, young as she was, that her true story would alter the friendships of many of her schoolmates; and for the first time she felt that it had been a cruelty, not a kindness, for Seth Winters, or whoever was responsible for the deed, to have placed her in such surroundings.

That Molly would repeat her history to all the school she did not doubt. Indeed, she hoped that this would be the case, for she was too honest to live under false pretences and if her chum didn't explain she must and she shrank from the ordeal. In fancy she could see the noses of those stately seniors tilt skywards in disdain, and the austerity of Miss Greatorex become unbearable.

Also, now, for the first time in her life she pitied that girl called Dorothy! and, at Molly's unexpected kiss upon her bowed head, the tears came. The kiss was aimed at Dolly's white temple but it landed on her brown hair-ribbon; yet the one sound arm that was flung around her shoulders gave them a hearty squeeze, while the tenderest voice in the world exclaimed:

"Oh! you poor, darling dear! Forgive, forgive, forgive unhappy blundering me! That's what comes

of your blue-blood! Why, that old Irishman who picked me out of the ditch that day wouldn't have trod and trampled on and abused my feelings as I have yours! Course it's all right, else you wouldn't be here. And, heart of grace! Isn't it the splendidest, most romantic story ever heard? Right true in real life, too! Why, who knows but that your own people are princes and kings and things? Who knows but it's just to bring you up in a regular common-sense sort of way that they broke their hearts by leaving you on that doorstep? How I'd like to see it! It ought to have a slab set in it, saying: 'Here's the Spot where Dorothy was Placed in her Infancy.'

"We have to go through Baltimore when we go home to Virginny, and Papa shall take me to see that house — Dorothy, tell me the street and number, quick!"

"Seventy-seven Brown street," whispered Dorothy, beginning to look up.

Molly repeated the address a half-dozen times, striking her breast dramatically as if she would beat it into her memory. Then she sprang up and skipped about the room, crying at last:

"Now, we've an object in life! We have something really grand to live for! We will trace your lost and royal parentage! We will restore you to your own! We will unravel the dastardly plot which has kept you in seclusion while — while —"

"A gentleman to see Miss Dorothy. He is in the small reception room with Miss Rhinelander. The

young lady will please attend the principal at once" came a message at the door.

A dash of cold water on a heated face may typify the falling of these young spirits at this announcement; for carried away by Mollie's flight of fancy Dorothy had already beheld herself a heroine of romance and of most exalted birth. From the contemplation of possible "kings and things" she was reduced to the homely necessity of receiving poor, self-conscious James Barlow in the haughty, disconcerting presence of Miss Rhinelander.

CHAPTER XII

A VISIT AND A VISITATION

THE young ladies of Rhinelander Academy were not permitted to receive calls except on certain days and at certain hours.

Jim Barlow did not know this; but Dorothy was painfully conscious of the fact and of the principal's dignified presence in the room. This consciousness gave a coldness to her manner that it otherwise would not have had, for in her heart she was wholly glad to see him.

Also, she had no sooner extended her hand in a formal manner than a memory of all the faithful lad had been to her in times of trouble rushed over her and made her forget all else. Then she veered to the other extreme and impulsively threw her arms about his neck as he sank back to his chair and kissed him soundly.

Both he and she glanced toward Miss Rhinelander, who merely raised her eyebrows as that resounding smack fell on her ears and calmly continued her perusal of her magazine. But the effect upon bashful James was not a happy one. He rather roughly unclasped Dorothy's arms, pushed her away from him,

and rose. His face was crimson and he stammered forth:

"I'm going now. I just come—"

"Why, of course, you have 'just come.' I haven't had time to ask a question, and there's so much, so much I want to know. First of all, are all well at home?"

She had pushed her visitor back again toward his chair, where he perched at an uncomfortable angle on its very edge, ready for instant flight should she again assail him with her too demonstrative affection. But he did not know that, from the corners of her eyes, the lady reading was observing this little by-play and was secretly amused by it.

By now, too, Dorothy's good sense had returned. She wouldn't annoy him by any further demonstrations, neither would she permit herself to be defrauded of his news because the principal was so near. It was all right that he should be here or he wouldn't have been admitted. Seating herself so that he was obliged to turn his chair in order to face her and, incidentally, his back toward Miss Rhinelander's forbidding countenance, she poured forth a string of questions so swiftly and eagerly that he had trouble to keep track of all.

"Well? Why yes, they're right smart to your house, now, all of 'em. Alfaretta's most like their own daughter, seems if, and a good thing, too seeing that they've lost you. Littlejohn Smith is doin' real likely. Wouldn't wonder if them two youngsters

should make their real homes to — I mean at — the farm. Mrs. Babcock says Alfy's got to earn her own keep now, because Pa's more took up than ever with those Anarchist notions of his'n. Why, sir, would you believe that there's folks in New York City fools enough to like to hear that feller spout? True, as preachin'. He was invited to 'lecture'— *lecture,* that idiot! — on 'equal rights' or some such nonsense, and he went to the city and done it. When he came back, Ma says, he was so lordly and up-steppin' there was scarce any living with him. Lucky, too, that just then his sister who lives in the west wrote another letter askin' him to come visit her a spell. So, since he'd got enough money for that there lecture he'd delivered, he set off to once. Ma says the best of it is, his sister used to be a master-hand to drive folks to work and she'll make her brother earn his keep or know the reason why. Ma hopes, too, that he'll like the west so well he'll stay there till the children get grown up and out of the way. She doesn't want her boys to learn and copy any of their father's nonsense; so soon as they get old enough and have sensible notions fixed in their heads he's welcome to come back but not before. Funny, ain't it? The sharp things Mrs. Babcock does say about her own man and right to him, too; but Alfaretta and she nigh cried their eyes out the day he started. You'd ha' thought they'd had a regular funeral. They spent the whole endurin' day to your house and their snifflin' and bewailing and general goings-on so fretted your

father that he up-crutches and went to the shop and stayed there till he knew it was time Ma would have to go home to do her chores. Then he went home and found your mother clean beat out and cross as two sticks. Alfy wasn't, though. By that time Alfy was as chipper as a blackbird, and tickled to death to think she wouldn't never be bothered with her silly father again. Queer! I must say I think women folks — big or little — are queer as Dick's hatband!"

"'Which went half-way around and tucked under!'" laughed Dorothy finishing the familiar simile for him. "But how about yourself, Jim dear? Can you manage to get on with your studies, now Mr. Winters is away?"

"That's what I came to tell you, most especial. I've had a letter from him that's made me feel terrible bad. He's sick. Got some sort of rheumatic fever, or the like of that, and no knowing when he'll be back. He's in Baltimore now, in that Johns Hopkin's hospital where your father was. But bad off as he is he's took all the trouble to make plans for me — for you, too, likely, though that's for your folks to tell. He's wrote to a minister in this town of Newburgh that's a friend of his'n and a tremendjus scholar. I'm to live with the minister, take care of his horse and do his other chores, and the rest the time I'm to study. The minister's goin' to fit me for Columbia College, Dorothy girl! Put that in your pipe and smoke it! Yes, siree! Mrs. Calvert is will-

ing; she's even hand-in-glove with the blacksmith in the whole business. She says that one of the grooms can do my work at Deerhurst for awhile till we try the experiment and see if it works all right. It's my chance, she says, to show what I'm good for, and Dorothy — *I'm going to show!* Don't you forget it! *I'm going to make good!* I'm going to repay her and him and you and every single person that's ever had a hand in the job of lifting me out of ignorance into wisdom. I've had my foot placed on the bottom of the ladder and I'll never rest till I get to the top — the highest tiptop — no matter if every rung between is redhot with hindrances and difficulties. Hear me say it now and when you come to see me graduated with honors, the highest honors, from Columbia College or University you'll know I ain't lyin'! And I shan't never forget, Dolly girl, how t'was you gave me the first push upward. Out there on Miranda Stott's truck-farm. Maybe that was why you was let to be kidnapped and I to get the notion of helping you home to your folks. Maybe! Seth Winters says there's no such thing as 'chance' in this world. He believes there's a Hand that arranges everything and that all the lessons of our lives are set by Him. Oh! I tell you, Dorothy, it's the hope of my life to be as wise and good a man as that plain blacksmith, though I couldn't never be contented to live so humble like as he does. I've got to make myself noticed, some way, to make up for what I didn't have in the beginning. A poorhouse boy has got as good a right

to make the world sit up and take notice as one that's been born rich. But — Shucks! I've clean forgot myself. I — I — Ma'am? MA'AM?"

Carried away by his own ambitious plans James Barlow had utterly forgotten time and place. He was excited almost to wildness — by the glorious prospects opening before him in the way of education, to him the highest good in life. Dorothy had always been the recipient of his confidences and to talk to her now so fluently was as natural as ever. Both he and she had risen, as his eloquence waxed, and now stood hand in hand, facing one another, both flushed and with eyes shining, lost to the present in these brilliant dreams of the future.

It was startling and yet after all it seemed quite in keeping with the matter that, at that moment, Miss Rhinelander should appear beside them, holding out her hand to Jim with admiration in her eyes and congratulation in her words.

"Young sir, I endorse all you aspire, and I most heartily wish you success in your ambition and your life. I believe that you deserve those 'highest honors' of which you speak and I apologize for overhearing, though I'm not sorry that I did. I, also, believe that learning, knowledge — the knowledge which opens our blind eyes to the wonders of God and His world — is life's highest good. Again I congratulate you, and say — Good day. Dorothy, my dear, it is the hour for your violin lesson and Herr von Peters is invariably prompt."

Had the ceiling fallen these two young people could scarcely have been more surprised. At that moment there was nothing proud nor austere about the stately principal, but a very womanly gentleness and enthusiasm which softened her handsome features wonderfully and brought to mind that first writing lesson of Dorothy's and its sentiment: "And the lives that seem so cold . . . Would seem full of love and spring."

Impulsively the girl caught her teacher's hand and kissed it, then blushed at her own temerity. But Miss Rhinelander did not resent the caress, only smiled and glanced toward the clock, and this meant dismissal.

"Good by, dear Jim. I hope you can come soon again if you're to live in this same city. Excuse me, Miss Rhinelander;" and with a squeeze of her old comrade's hand, a graceful courtesy to the principal, Dorothy withdrew. But she could not keep her feet from skipping along the hall to the music room where she came, humming a little song, into the very presence of the old German gentleman who taught her violin.

Her smiling greeting was like a ray of sunshine in that storm-darkened room and in the exile's heart. Not always had he been a poor teacher in an alien land, and news from his old home across the sea had that day touched his heart to melancholy as somber as the weather. But now a girl's gay mood banished his gloom and moved him to say:

"I foresee it will be a fine lesson this time, Fräulein. Somewhat has happened to give you joy and joy is often genius! Now is the opportune moment! Let us begin."

They did and he proved a true prophet. Dorothy had never done so well as on that occasion, and it seemed to her that she had never been so glad nor so ambitious. Already the circumstance of her unknown birth, her poverty, her real orphanage, were almost forgotten. If James Barlow, of even lowlier condition than herself, could overcome all disadvantages, could lift himself to a high place of learning and success, so could she, and — *she would!*

So she went back to her friend Molly as serenely contented as she had always been before that talk of the morning; and when her chum began to lay plans for "unearthing the mystery of birth and lineage," as she loftily expressed it, she was met by the common sense statement:

"I shan't trouble myself to 'unearth' anything, and you needn't. I shall speak to Miss Penelope and ask her to tell the girls in this school anything she thinks proper about me and my station in life. I don't want any of them to think I'm better nor richer than I am. It's 'all right or I shouldn't be here,' just as you said. It's not likely Mr. Winters, or whoever it is that pays for my schooling, would put me in a false position with the principals, whether other people understood or not. I'd love to know who I really am. Oh! how I long to know! for after our talk it

seems as I can't forget I'm a 'nameless' and that my parents abandoned me."

"Oh! you poor, sweetest, darlingest dear! My heart just aches for you! I suffer —" interrupted Molly, catching her friend's hand and kissing it enthusiastically.

"As much as you suffer for marshmallows, Molly? But you needn't waste your pity on me. I don't need it. I have everything a girl can possibly want to make her glad and I'm going to be glad. Watch me and see. But I shan't 'poke' into things. I promised dear Seth Winters that I wouldn't, and yet I've just come near doing so. After Miss Pen has set me straight with the others —"

"You needn't count on her. She'll never say a word, she'll be so afraid of doing you an injustice or hurting your feelings."

"She needn't be. I shan't let them be hurt. And after all she will have no occasion to tell for you'll save her the trouble. It would be impossible for you, dearie, to keep such a strange story to yourself, gossip that you are!"

"Well, Dorothy, I think that's mean of you, to call me a gossip!" retorted Molly, stung by this keen estimate of her news-loving nature. "I'm no bigger gossip than you are, or — or anybody else. Everybody likes to hear things. You do, dearly."

"Course, silly! And I'm not saying it's a fault. Maybe to hear and tell things is a part of that 'observation' Miss Rhinelander enjoins. But, heigho!

There's the bell again! Seems as if time never went so fast anywhere as it does here. Never one single moment wasted, but one thing fitting into another just like a hand in a glove. Come on. It's so nasty out of doors I suppose we'll take our 'constitutionals' in the 'Gym,' as usual. I'll fetch your hat and jacket, and, Molly Breckenridge, don't you dare to love me less, don't you dare to think scornfully of me just because I'm a 'Dorothy C.' with no tail to her surname — capital letter."

"Indeed, I won't! I shall just love you all the more to make up for the people who left you and who'd ought to be — to be 'kicked by cripples' for doing it."

There was another exchange of kisses, and a mild reproof to careless Molly on her use of a prohibited simile — her strongest — then arm in arm the pair sped down the stairs and along the glass-roofed, long passage which led outward from the chief building.

Other girls in gymnasium costumes, or caps and sweaters, thronged the passage or scattered themselves about the great arched room that was fitted with all the most approved aids to physical exercise and where the teacher of that branch of culture already awaited her senior class.

Dorothy loved the "Gym," although she was as yet beginning her training there; and drawing Molly to one side they perched themselves upon a window ledge at the extreme rear of the building. They chose the spot as the best for observation and because no-

body would disturb them in it. It was not an attractive one, save that they could see so well all that went on indoors; for outwardly the window looked upon the laundry, the ash-boxes, tool houses, and all the unsightly belongings of such a great establishment. From here, too, could be seen the disused kitchen where Peter Piper had established himself and where he had remained unobserved by anybody on the grounds, from the day of Molly's accident and his arrival here.

Peter had made himself extremely comfortable. He had kept well hidden by daylight but had watched his opportunity to steal into the carriage house and stable unobserved. From these he had secured a couple of blankets and a seat-cushion, so that his bed was now a luxurious one to him. From the garbage-cans he supplied himself with waste food, and there was running water in the little house, which somebody's carelessness had failed to "turn off" at the approach of freezing weather.

Among the stablemen there had been great wonder over the disappearance of the articles named, but as no other loss followed the first it was merely laid to "somebody's" fault and soon forgotten.

Though Dorothy had so stoutly declared that she would not "poke" into the mystery of her own history she could not forget the talk in the hospital: and tired of watching the senior class go through their exercises she leaned back against the window-casing and gazed out upon the storm. Molly had left her

alone now, to join some others in the long passage, and she let her thoughts wander over her whole short life and the striking changes which even those few years had brought with them.

In this quiet mood she scarcely saw the little rain-washed back building upon which her gaze was dreamily fixed; till, after a time, she realized that its door was slowly opening and that a face peered forth. This struck her as queer, for she had been told by somebody that it was a disused kitchen, no longer required for the household needs. She and Molly had even gone so far as to make up a story about it, in which it became the abode of ghosts, and actually to find themselves "all goose-fleshy" and shuddering over the tales their own fancy evoked. She smiled now, remembering; and then the smile suddenly died while here eyes grew wild and strained.

"The place *is* 'haunted'! There *is* somebody in that house! A queer somebody who looks — Molly, Molly! Come here!" She turned to beckon excitedly toward her chum, yet with finger upon lip, explaining that she wanted no other than her friend, who at that mysterious signal came hurriedly indeed.

"What is it? What's happened? What makes you look so strange?"

"Oh! look out, look out there to the little kitchen where our 'ghost' has come true! I wish the rain didn't dash so against the pane, making it so streaky we can't half see through. But watch! Between

drops. See that door? Doesn't it move? Doesn't it slide back and forth? Isn't there somebody peeping — as if afraid — somebody —"

With that Dolly gave a little pinch to Molly's arm who acknowledged it by a squeal which, fortunately, nobody heard. Then she pressed her friend's face close against the glass and Molly saw what she was directed to see.

"Oh! Ouch! Br-r-r! Spooks by daylight! My heart! I'm all shivery and scarey and delightfully shocked! Yet, of course, silly Dolly, it's one of the grooms who's gone in there to get out of the storm or to shirk his work. There's no such luck as it's being a really truly 'haunt,'" asserted the young Virginian.

"Then if it isn't why are you turning pale and cuddling up to me? It is a 'haunt' and I've — *I've seen it before.* Once it frightened me nearly into fits, till I found out it was a good-hearted 'haunt' and not the sort that harms people."

"You've — seen — it — before? Where?" demanded Molly, incredulously.

"At my home. Now — look, look! The face! There it is again!"

Molly put her hand over her eyes yet managed to peep between her fingers, and what she saw was certainly grotesque if not ghostly. It was a face, white and thin, surmounted by a queer cap trimmed with faded red feathers and a sadly tarnished buckle. The eyes in the face were large and protuberant and al-

most as colorless as the mass of pale hair beneath the cap.

To her there was nothing familiar about this apparition, and she was considerably surprised when, after another moment of watching, Dorothy said:

"I must go to find Miss Penelope. Please don't say anything, not a word about that — that 'haunt' yonder — till I give you leave. Will you come with me or stay here and — hold your tongue? That isn't as elegant a way to put it as Miss Rhinelander would use but I mean it. Which?"

"Stay here alone and hold my tongue about that thing out there? Well, I guess not. The only way I can keep from telling about it is to go with you and let you do the talking. Ouch! I declare I don't want any more upsettings, to-day! I — I positively feel faint!" said Molly, snuggling to Dorothy's side as she moved swiftly across the room.

CHAPTER XIII

A MEMORABLE ENTERTAINMENT

DOROTHY looked up from the letter she was writing as Molly came skipping into the room, to catch her around the shoulders and, incidentally, to upset the ink. The accident happened in the little study-parlor so rarely used of an evening by the other young ladies, but utilized by the backward "newer" for the preparation of the morrow's lessons.

"There, Molly Breckenridge, just see what you've done! Ruined my letter to Mrs. Calvert, that I have to take such pains with and that I'll have to do all over again! Oh! dear! I do wish you wouldn't be so careless, child!" wailed Dorothy, catching up a blotter to stay the flood of ink.

"Child yourself, if it comes to that, Miss Propriety! No harm done anyway. Wise of the Prex to have the desk covered with oilcloth and always to have wiping-rags kept in the scrap-basket. I do wish you wouldn't study every single evening instead of having a little fun with the rest of us. I'm going to take those books away because —"

"Please, Molly dear! I must study. I simply

must. I am away behind all of you in lots of things and Miss Greatorex says —"

"Never mind the 'Grater.' She couldn't help 'saying' to save her life. She must have begun to reprove her mother from her cradle; though I own she isn't all bad. Not all. She condescended to 'say' one decent thing about you, yourself: and that was that you were the only young lady she had ever supervised who didn't 'sass' her now and then."

"Molly, she didn't say 'sass.' She couldn't. Such an inelegant word would choke her."

"Well, she meant the same thing. Never mind that letter. You'd have to write it over again after you've heard my news. Listen. Fold your hands. Shut your eyes. Open your ears. Ready? Then comprehend. WE ARE GOING TO HAVE IT!"

"Oh! you dear, nonsensical girl! Can't you find somebody else to tease instead of hindering my lessons with your foolishness?" asked Dorothy, vainly attempting to resume her pen and her writing.

But she was not permitted. This was regular recreation hour, as both girls knew, and to study during that time was to set oneself up for a "prig." Molly simply laid both hands upon her chum's own, cocked her saucy head on one side and remarked:

"Miss Do'thy! You-all's too good fo' dis yeah mortial yarth! Yo' sutney is. Doan' you feel it in yo' boneses? Ain' it de trufe?"

Dorothy laughed. The other's mimicry of the colored people with whom each had been "raised" was

inimitable: and having laughed knew that she had yielded to the demand upon her. So she quietly put aside her work and asked in turn:

"Well, what is it we are going to have? And if you have any more pretty compliments to relate I wish you'd tell them. For indeed and indeedy! I'm real discouraged, I get ahead so slowly. So I need cheering up."

"'Shadow and shine is life, little Annie; flower and thorn,'" quoted Molly, who loved poetry and had written some rather creditable verses herself. "I wouldn't for the world encourage your vanity too much, but the truth is that Herr von Peters fairly raves over your progress to us other stupids. He says you have the 'musical soul,' whatever that may be, and that he will turn you out 'one who shall move the hearts of all who listen to her.' That's when he gets *done* with you, missy! He didn't say you could do it now, though you can! Why, the other evening, when you were practising your scales or whatever it is that's most screechy on a fiddle, I heard Elizabeth Marshall say that she would certainly go mad! Think of that, fiddler, and don't feel too 'sot up' over a poor old Dutchman's 'phrenzy fine.'"

"Upon my word, Dorothy Doodles! Haven't you a bit of curiosity left in you? Don't you care to hear my news, that I'm fairly bursting to tell?"

"Of course. Tell ahead."

"Then listen. 'The Misses Rhinelander request the pleasure of your company at a *musicale* and *bal*

poudre to be given in the assembly rooms of Rhinelander Academy, February twentieth, of this current year. R. S. V. P.' There, ma'am! What do you think of that! What do — you — think of — that, Dolly Doodles?"

And catching her mate in her arms away whirled the merry girl around and about the room till, breathless, she paused and holding the other off sternly demanded:

"What shall you wear? And who shall you ask? 'Toby or some other fellow,' 'that is the question'!"

"Now, you've worked yourself into a decent quiet, sit down and tell me the whole story, 'body and bones' as Mr. Martin says."

Dropping upon the little lounge near by they nestled together, schoolgirl fashion, while Molly explained that:

"Almost every year the Prex has given us an entertainment. It has commonly been a mild, cake-and-ice-cream sort of an affair; but this year our distinguished seniors have pleaded for something more elaborate. Some of them want to show off what they can do in the way of music — that's the '*musicale*' part and be sure when you mention it that you spell it with an 'e'— and some have developed wonderful gracefulness under the Gym and dancing teachers; and, well, everybody likes a good time. So the principals have consented. It's to be a real full dress affair. There will be a good many older people invited, of course; all the parents and folks that pay the bills!

But besides that, each of us can invite one guest. That one must be a boy, because as Papa would express it we're very 'long' on girls but terribly 'short' on boys. Lucky for us there's that boys' school, Brentnor Hall, and as it's about as exclusive as our own there's no objection made to our asking the students from there. There are some mighty nice fellows among them; and I just do love boys! Don't you?"

"I — I guess so. I don't know many. Only Jim Babcock, and Mike Martin, and Dan and Littlejohn Smith, and Peter Piper and — Why, yes, and Herbert Montaigne. But he's off to Europe so he couldn't come even if I asked him."

"Humph! I reckon you know enough without him, the way you count them off. Montaigne — Montaigne? Why, child alive, that's the name of Aunt Lucretia's steamer friends! She wrote me about them in one of her letters. She went across with them this very fall that ever was and said she was interested in them because they lived within a few miles of Newburgh and me. Funny little bit of a world, isn't it? Where folks are all the time meeting folks that their folks know?" demanded this young philosopher with more earnestness than clearness.

"Very. Seems if you do a lot of thinking that nobody would suspect you of, Molly Breckenridge. You quite surprise me sometimes by the odd things you say."

"Exactly, Miss Wisdom. Rather astonished that

all the thinking isn't done by your own small head, eh? Well, there's one thing my dear Daddy taught me in my earliest youth: that was to give other people credit for knowing just a little bit more than I do myself. That way, he said, I'd be saved the mortification of being 'took down' now and then. But we're wasting time. First we know the prayer-bell will ring, then retiring, and 'nothing done yet.' I've settled who I shall invite. That's Monty Stark;" and she sank back in her corner with a pleased expression on her lively face.

"Hmm. Is he as pretty as his name, honey?"

"Now, honey, yourself. Don't be smart. He belongs to that old Revolutionary family of New England and his right, full name is Montmorency. Mr. Montmorency Vavasour-Stark; one of those high-faluting hypheny names, by your leave. Monty for short, we girls call him — behind his back. We'd not dare do it to his face. The other boys say 'Starky,' He's terrible brave, like his ancestors. He says so himself;" explained Molly, enthusiastically.

"Has he ever proved it?" demanded Dolly the practical.

"Of course. Lots of times, I suppose. He's perfectly lovely to look at and he dresses beautifully. He never wears his clothes but a little while, then gives them away and buys new, so that he's always in the best style. His new overcoat, that he had on at church last Sunday, is a dream! He —"

"Oh! never mind his clothes. Anybody can have

new ones if he has money to buy them and wants to waste it that way. What kind of a boy fits inside the clothes? That's the main thing. I wouldn't like you to be friends with a silly one and seems if he must be a very silly one if he thinks so much about what he wears."

"Now, Dorothy girl! Why must you always dig down to the roots of things that way? But I guess — I guess — Montmorency Vavasour-Stark will bear digging into. He has big blue eyes and such long lashes they fairly sweep his cheeks when he drops them —"

"Do his cheeks need sweeping? Are they so dusty as that?" laughed Dolly: but her mate ignored the question and continued:

"His hair is nut-brown and curly and quite long. He has a hair-dresser do it, on state occasions, same as a girl would."

"What girl? Who'd be so simple she couldn't 'do' her own hair?" asked Dorothy, in fine scorn.

"Why, you yourself, for one. Course. On the day of the musicale the hair-dresser will come here real early and she'll dress every single one of our hairs —"

"How can she have time to count them!" again interrupted Dolly, who now that her studying had been interfered with had given herself over to the nonsense that possessed her mind.

"Of course, she has to bring assistants. One woman couldn't fix the heads of all of us in a single

afternoon. There'll be no study nor lessons that day, just getting ready for the evening; that's all. She has to do the senior's first. They always do claim the best of everything that's going. Some of them aren't coming back here after the Easter holidays, and that's one reason that the principals have consented to such a big affair. The seniors pay part of the expense, so as to have things the way they like. And dress? My heart! You'll scarcely know them in their 'war paint' and best duds. Every one of us wears our very best and Miss Rhinelander will have some seamstresses come in right away, to go over all our things and see that they are fit. She's a great hand for 'simplicity' but it's my notion that it's harder to make a 'simple' frock look stylish than it is a fussy one. Auntie thinks so, too. All the boys wear evening clothes, the sort that is right for them, and the seniors over at the Hall wear the same kind that gentlemen and — head waiters do! Monty Stark looks too sweet for words in *his* things!"

Dorothy flung herself back and laughed till the tears came. Then cried:

"What a guy that boy must be! 'Sweet' for a boy is about as bad as saying anybody is 'clever,' and Mother Martha says that's the same as calling him a good-natured simpleton. That is here in America, for father told me 'clever' meant 'intelligent,' in England. Well, I long to see you paragon! and I don't believe he can compare with Jim Barlow for real manliness and — and whatever goes to make the best

sort of boy. I shall ask *him* if Miss Rhinelander will let me."

"That lout? I caught a glimpse of him, the other day, and of all the awkward, common looking fellows I ever saw he was the chief. You just wait till you see Mr. Vavasour-Stark! Then you'll see something worth while. Dear Monty! He's a perfectly — perfectly heavenly boy!"

"All right. I shan't envy you. If only my Jim will come! And there rings the bell. Come on."

Study was sadly interfered with by thoughts of the coming musicale and *bal poudre,* and more than once during the days which interevened did the principals regret their too ready consent to the affair. One of their ordinary receptions would have been simpler and done away with all this planning among the students of their Academy.

Yet, having once consented, they saw to it that the entertainment should be as perfect as time and expense could make it. The great assembly rooms were thrown open and given over into the hands of decorators and florists. Caterers transformed the dining and breakfast halls into sumptuous apartments. Spotlessly arrayed maids assisted in the cloak-rooms — ordinarily the "girls' own" parlor and writing "cosies." Teachers wore a look of anxiety and business quite different from the calmness of ordinary days and the quiet routine of recitations. In one corner of the great entrance hall a temporary stand was erected, draped with the national colors and screened

by mighty palms, and upon this, at the appointed hour, the finest band obtainable was stationed to render the music which was to be continuous throughout the evening; and to supplement that rendered by the pupils themselves.

Into this new world of light and color and sweet strains, little Dorothy came with timid steps yet an eager expectancy in her brown eyes and a deeper flush than usual on her cheek. There had been no difficulty about her clothes. Her preference and her teachers' approval had been for a white lawn, most simply made yet of exquisite fit and fineness. There was no color about her except that of her own fair face and more than one guest looked at her with admiring interest. More particularly when, by Herr von Peter's express desire, she played a few sweet, simple melodies upon her beloved violin. As she took her place beside him on the little, flower-bedecked platform, her heart beat almost to suffocation, for one glance over that strange, glittering audience had frightened her. Even her familiar school-mates were scarcely recognizable in their "party clothes" as Molly had foretold, but then occurred that which banished all timidity and gave her a skill beyond even her master's expectation.

This was the sight of a little group she had not before discovered, that had entered very quietly and begged for the least conspicuous seats. Father and Mother and Jim Barlow. The plainest people there and to her the dearest. For them she would do her

utmost. They should be proud of her, they should, she would make them! Not one of the master's instructions would she forget; for he, too, was whispering in her ear:

"Do me credit, little Sunbeam, as you can. Put all thought away except that of the melody and its message to those waiting human hearts out yonder. Listen only to your violin and — Begin!"

She obeyed him, and slight as her training had yet been, her opening chords stole so softly, sweetly, smoothly into the hum of voices that the murmuring ceased, as it might have done at the unexpected song of a bird.

There was nothing marvelous about the music, of course, except its real sincerity: to which the pretty picture formed by the earnest old professor and his wholly absorbed young pupil added its own charm.

There were hand claps and calls for an *encore,* but this was not allowed, since already the numbers on the program were consuming much time: but there followed one song, a duet by Molly and Dolly, whose voices harmonized well and who both sang as naturally as birds.

Then Dorothy stepped down into the audience and her part in the evening's entertainment was over. Such a happy girl she was as she hurried to greet her friends and so proud were they! Father John's eyes looked fairly misty with delight and pride, though it may have been more from the joy of being reunited to his darling. He had missed her beyond telling;

and he had that in mind which he dreaded to announce. But for a little time they were together, her dear eyes looking love into his own, her merry chatter sweeter to his ears than even her music had been.

As for Martha, she felt at ease; and, radiant with pride, beamed on the people near her in such friendly smiles that they smiled back, thereby confirming her in the opinion:

"Real society folks or gentlefolks — the real, not the imitation sort — are a deal easier to get on with and a deal simpler than them that make believe. Like Mrs. Betty Calvert, you know, who might be just anybody for all the air she puts on. Why, Mrs. Smith, I wish you could have seen that company of ladies and gentlemen, dressed all in their silks and satins and their swallow-tails, a sittin' round just as sensible and folksy as if they was you and me. I did have a good time, I certainly did have a nice visit;" as she testified to her neighbor, afterward.

Then the musical part being over there followed the supper; served by the caterer's assistants so deftly and so swiftly that some hungry guests felt aggrieved. Notably the lads from Brentnor Hall who were like other healthy youths always ready for food. Even Mother Martha found here a bit of cause for resentment, exclaiming to her husband:

"Why, that waiter just dashed a plate at me, stuck a mite of somethin' on it and snatched it away again, before I could half enjoy it. Some sort of oyster fixings, too, that was real tasty. I'd intended to ask

for another helping but I didn't get a chance."

However, the feast was served only after the orthodox fashion; and if some thought it cut short unreasonably, there were others who felt it but a delay of pleasanter things. In any case, it was but a short time later that the room had been cleared of all its little tables and its superfluous furniture; and the handsome rugs being rolled out of the way a finely waxed floor was ready for the *bal poudre.*

Meanwhile, the seniors of both schools had disappeared and it was not until the younger students had for some time been enjoying their chance to waltz or quadrille that these absentees returned; and then, indeed, did their juniors modestly retire and leave the floor to them, eclipsed and — Dorothy, at least,— amazed by the transformation that brief absence had wrought.

Here were no familiar schoolmates with brown or golden locks, in dainty girlish gowns; but a lot of stately women in old-time brocades and velvets, each with her hair piled high upon her head, powdered to a snowy whiteness, and each with some tiny patch upon her face that enhanced the fairness of her cheeks, after a custom of long ago.

Dorothy clutched her father's hand, and poor James Barlow, who had spent the wretchedest evening of his life, forgot himself and stared. Were those the same young lads who had seemed so eager for their suppers, now comporting themselves with the dignity of noblemen? Their closely shaved or "football

hair," as the case might be, covered by perukes, in velvet coats and knee-breeches, and flowing ruffles of lace?

"Well, well, well! You could knock me down with a feather!" cried Mother Martha, admiringly; while Dorothy rubbed her eyes to see if they told the truth or if she were dreaming.

Then she heard her father saying:

"That little girl friend of yours, Miss Molly, is beckoning you to come to that cosy corner where she and other youngsters are sitting. You'd better go, dear, for a little while and come back to us then. I like the girl's looks. Take Jim with you. He's your especial guest, you know and," adding for her ear only, "he doesn't look happy."

He would have declined to go, had he dared; but before he understood what she would be at, Dorothy had drawn her old comrade out of his chair and out upon the floor, where a little while before she had attempted to make him dance with her and where he had made what he considered a "show" of himself. He had never danced a step in his life and couldn't comprehend his partner's whispered injunctions as to the manner of doing so. He realized that his neat, ill-fitting business suit was wholly unlike the attire of all the other youths in the room and he had precipitately fled back to his seat, leaving Dorothy alone in the middle of the floor.

The laugh which followed was wholly good-natured, nobody thought it a crime or at all uncommon

for a growing lad to be awkward, but the laugh still rang in the sensitive fellow's ears and made his face again turn scarlet.

However, he was again right in plain sight of everybody and, with his insistent hostess, evidently interrupting the progress of that stately minuet then in progress. Fortunately, she perceived this and veered aside, so that he felt it were easier to follow than to retreat. So they came to Molly in her corner; who obligingly made room for them upon the little divan and promptly introduced her attendant:

"Miss Dorothy, allow me to present Mr. Vavasour-Stark."

Monty bowed with all the grace of an incipient Chesterfield, and Dolly made her profoundest courtesy, thus veiling from the lad's gaze the amused expression of her too mobile face, while a murmur of admiration was sighed by the group of other girls surrounding Molly and her hero.

One glimpse of their adoring regard for the descendant of "the Starks" was enough for Dolly's mischievous spirit; and with exaggerated simplicity she remarked:

"Well, Jim, this is 'Jolly Molly,' and Monty, and Lucile, and — Is there room for us on that lounge, Moll? Jim doesn't like to stand long. He's so nice and long himself it makes him ache. Short people don't mind, I suppose;" and she smilingly scanned the Brentnor boy's diminutive stature.

It was meanly rude of her, Molly thought, with the

full intention of telling her so at the first convenient season. Yet despite the rudeness her speech had the affect of clearing the air of affectation, and Monty responded with an answering frankness that proved him to be not half the fop he pretended. He was curled and perfumed and modishly clothed. He wore a costly orchid in his buttonhole, his gloves and tie were immaculate, and his shoes shone with the last degree of polish. Yet, despite the effeminacy of his appearance and his undersize, there was still something about him which made one believe that he would prove "all right" if given half a chance.

"He's his muzzer's darlin' ittsy pittsy boy, so he is! and he s'all have everything in the world his muzzer's money can buy, so he s'all!" mocked Dolly, when a little later good-nights were said and the friends were climbing wearily toward their adjoining rooms and bed. Late hours like these were so unknown in their well regulated lives that even pleasure could not prevent drowsiness; and with a yawn Molly answered:

"Well, Monty Stark 's a nice boy. Montmorency Vavasour-Stark is quite another fellow. But despite all you think, I'd match him against your gawky, long-legged Jim in a matter of real courage. And, I don't care anyway. I'm too tired and sleepy and — What a glorious time we've had! Shall we ever, ever forget this happy night?"

Indeed, they were not to forget; and before the morning dawned the courage which each claimed for her favorite boy friend was to be put to the test.

CHAPTER XIV

LADS' COURAGE

PETER PIPER had never been so happy and so comfortable in his life.

Not even his home at the cottage or the smithy had seemed so luxurious as his present one in the old kitchen on the Rhinelander grounds. For on that day when she had discovered his presence there, Dorothy had gone straight to Miss Penelope to disclose the mystery of the harmless, pitiable "ghost" and to enlist that gentle lady's interest on the poor lad's behalf.

No sooner was the story told than there came the kind assurrance:

"Of course he can stay there if, as you say, he is never vicious as some such afflicted persons are. The 'touched of God' my dear mother used to call these unfortunates and her children have never failed to show the compassion toward them which she taught us to observe. I'm sure that my sister, Miss Rhinelander, will approve; and I give you girls permission to make him fully comfortable in his self-chosen home by anything within reason. Within reason," she repeated smiling; "because young folks are apt to let their

sympathy run away with their common sense. Remember, he isn't accustomed to *fine* surroundings. A comfortable bed, warmth, cleanliness, plenty of good food, and entire freedom to follow his own erratic moods, are the best we can do for him. I hope he will not get a wandering fit again, during the cold weather, but will be contented here."

So, on the next day when the weather had cleared, the two girls kept close watch upon the outbuilding and fortunately surprised Peter sneaking into it after a stealthy visit to the garbage can. Of necessity there was much waste of food in that large establishment, and the broken bits of bread and meat he thus obtained were fresher and more palatable than their name of garbage would commonly suggest. Indeed, he had rarely been so well fed, except at Martha's; and finding himself apparently unobserved for a considerable time, he had grown a trifle careless in his foraging.

Hence his so easy capture, though at the first moment he sought to evade this by flight. Yet, when Dorothy clasped his arm so kindly, and her beloved face so lighted with real joy, he could but listen to her words and try to understand them. At last her meaning penetrated to his brain, as she reiterated her statement:

"You are to stay right here in the same place that I live now. The little house is your very, very own. You are to have a little fire in it and warm, right kind of bedclothes. You are to wash and keep yourself tidy, and you'll be given clothes so that you can.

Three times a day you are to go into that other kitchen where the servants eat and have a good meal, not one snatched from the waste heap. You are not to run away at all. Everybody here is your friend, nobody will hurt you or make fun of you. Never, never. And to pay for this there are many things you can do."

Molly had clung to Dorothy's arm, still half afraid of the strange looking fellow whose great eyes seemed almost to devour her chum, so patiently explaining again and again the good fortune that had come to him. But gradually, as he seemed to comprehend and the dull expression of his face altered to one of pleased intelligence, she lost her silly fear and added her own persuasive words to Dorothy's.

So that when Dorothy had stopped speaking, and he asked in his croaking voice: "What things?" she fairly clapped her hands and beamed upon him, wholly delighted.

"Why, I reckon you can keep the driveways and footpaths free of weeds and rubbish. When the snow comes you can shovel snow. You can trim the garden hedge like you did last year at the Towers and at Deerhurst."

"Besides all that," interrupted the impulsive Molly, "we're going to give you our pocket-money, Dolly and I, and some of the other girls will help. I'm sure of that, though I haven't asked them yet. And when — when I get mine again!" finished the laughing girl, suddenly remembering for how long a time

ahead her weekly allowance was already mortgaged.

But the money part didn't trouble Peter Piper. Nothing troubled him now that he was reunited to his beloved Dorothy and that she had promised to take care of him. So it was with a deftness and delight that he entered into the girls' generous efforts to arrange his new quarters for his greatest comfort.

Even when other stranger girls heard of the matter and begged to join in these efforts he did not shy away as he so commonly did from unknown people. He saw that all their young and lovely faces held that magic light of kindness. Not one of them that looked askance at his odd attire or distorted features; not one but had a word of praise, a bit of jest such as even he could understand.

In his old wandering life Peter had helped at many a country "Bee," such as that held at the farm for the newcomer's benefit, or at barn-raisings, or the "vandoos" when farmers held an auction of their goods, but never at any such a "Bee" as this.

"Peter Piper's Bee." So Dorothy named it, country fashion, and such they made it truly. All his own! One who had never made her own bed in her life now daintily spread the sheets upon this brand new mattress contributed by — guess who?

The "Grater" herself! Fact. And who by that contribution to this cause forever lost that most obnoxious title and again proved the truth of Dorothy's favorite poem. "Underneath the winter snows" of an unfortunate manner the too-exact instructress was,

after all, as "full of love and spring" as the most eager girl among them.

When all was done, the bevy of happy toilers brought Miss Rhinelander and Miss Penelope out to see the result; and the wonder it was of all that even of these proud old gentlewomen the kindness-softened, kindness-humanized poor "natural" was not at all afraid.

Naturally, Dorothy had told her parents and James Barlow all of this affair; and though their long drive home made further delay unwise for them there was no reason why the lad shouldn't visit his old acquaintance in his new home. Jim's own new quarters were but a few squares distant and he had confided to the clergyman with whom he now lived — himself an honored guest at the *musicale* — his wish to "just step in and take a look at the poor chap and let him know he's got another friend near by." "Besides, I've a little of my wages in my pocket, left from Mrs. Calvert's pay, and I'd like to share 'em with him. Makes a fellow feel more like a man to have a bit of money in hand," said this once so impecunious youth, with something of an air.

Dr. Sterling readily approved; and so it happened that instead of leaving the Academy grounds at once he made his way to the old kitchen, following Dorothy's directions as best he could in the half-light which penetrated the screening sprunces.

"Peter Piper! Let me in? Jim. Jim Barlow, who's come to 'pass the time of day.'"

For a few minutes the visitor was kept standing outside in the sharpness of the winter night; then the door was cautiously drawn a little aside and Peter peered through.

"Why — why — Jim! Hello!"

"Hello! yourself, old fellow. Do open the door and ask me in. I've heard what a fine new house you have all to yourself, and I want to see it. Dorothy told me. Our little Dorothy. My! lad! But you should have seen her to-night! Wouldn't have known her myself, scarcely, only I did! Never dreamed I'd be to any such doings as those in yonder great house, I didn't. Let me in and I'll tell you all about it."

Finally the caller was admitted, yet still Peter was not cordial. In his dim way he feared that Jim had come to rob him of his present comfort. He could only associate the lad with the old life on the mountain, which he recalled with more clearness than seemed possible. But suffering makes a deep impression upon even the most clouded mind and on the mountain this unfortunate had suffered, mentally and physically.

But after a time, since Jim was only and wholly admiring and showed no signs of claiming this fine home for his own, the half-wit began to talk, and tell in his wandering manner all that he could recall since they two parted. He listened, too, with interest to the news of Seth Winters's illness, though he still connected it merely with the injuries that gentleman

had received at the time of the memorable forest fire.

"Get Dorothy to bandage it. Tell Dorothy to tear her dress off and tie it up. Girls' dresses cure hurt ankles. Get Dorothy;" advised Peter, adding fresh coal to the fire in his little stove. Having so often suffered from cold the poor lad could now scarcely get heat enough, and Jim remarked, in protest:

"Don't make it any hotter in here, boy! You'll roast yourself if you do. But — Shucks! Whoever gave you this chair picked out a mighty comfortable one. It fits a fellow's back like it was run into it. Fits the head, too, and mine begins to ache. A chap like me, that's got to study night and day, hasn't any business at parties and such places. More especial when he makes a clean down fool of himself. I felt, Peter Piper, 'like a cow in a crockery shop.' Like I'd smash something any which way I turned, and I like this better. A mighty sight better. Tell you! You go on to bed and I'll take a wink of sleep, 'fore I go out into the cold again. The minister gave me a night-key, so I can get in his house any time I want; and, if I'm there in time to feed and water the horse in the morning, it'll be all right. You go on to bed. I'm going to sleep."

Jim suited the action to the word: leaning his head back against the cushioned chair which Elizabeth Marshall's generosity had provided for the outcast and presently falling into a profound slumber.

But Peter Piper was not drowsy. He had never been more wide awake. Always susceptible to music

he had listened outside the windows to the band within, till his whole being was a-thrill to the sweet sounds. Through the window he had watched his beloved Dorothy take her stand, with her violin upon her shoulder, and could catch the moving strains she rendered. He could see the people applauding; and out in the cold and darkness, alone, unfit for that gay company within, he too clapped his great hands applauding. He had watched her on the floor, moving gracefully to and fro with some young partner, as well as her efforts to make Jim dance as they did. He had seen all, all; and his dull brain was excited beyond any former experience, even to an almost keen intelligence.

He pulled another chair to the little window and looked out upon the larger buildings beyond. These were in two parts, the "old" and the "new" Academy. The former was of wood, connected by a narrow passage, or set of passages, three stories in height, with the fine brick and stone structure erected but a few years previous. The wooden part was called the Dormitory; though, instead of being in large apartments such as dormitories usually are, it still retained its small bedrooms, occupied by one or two pupils, as we have seen in the case of Dorothy and Molly.

Molly Breckenridge now occupied the companion chamber to Dorothy's, sharing the same bathroom; and by some means Peter had learned this fact and where the two girls were lodged. Upon these third story

windows he now fixed his gaze, wondering over their occupants' appearance at the party and if they would look the same again when seen by daylight.

Always a dim light was left burning in the corridors upon which all the sleeping-rooms opened, and this showed through an uncurtained window at the end. Peter always liked that light. Many a time he had risen from his uneasy slumbers to look toward it and always it had comforted him with the sense of his Dorothy's being so near. Wherever Dorothy was he was safe. She was so kind, so thoughtful, and so wholly able in her small self to protect him from any harm or evil.

But to-night the radiance did not sooth him as in ordinary. It was different. It was brighter. Why, it was growing brighter all the time! !

The watcher fidgetted in his chair. He had half-a-mind to rouse Jim Barlow sleeping yonder and show him the light, too. Then he hesitated. If he waked his visitor Jim would surely go away and leave him alone again. He didn't want to be alone. He wished that the lad would wake of his own accord and talk to him. He didn't like that light growing so bright — so terribly, vividly bright. It made him think of a day long past, when he had watched a group of young folks picnicking in the woods, with Seth Winters teaching them.

Dorothy was with them, too. But that day Dorothy had not been kind. She had not let him follow her and be her "shadow." Yet he *had* followed all

the same. Though he had waited till these others had finished their roasted potatoes and dinners under the trees, and had made himself a picnic all alone, under some other trees so far away that Dorothy could not see him nor his disobedience.

He had built such a fine fire. He had roasted his own potatoes, just as these others had done and he, too, had done often during his wandering life. He had eaten his fill and he had gone to sleep. Afterward, when he waked up, his fire had grown so great it had nearly set himself a-blaze. Ah! how well he remembered! How he had watched it in a frightened fascination, as it spread and spread and spread! First the little oak shrubs, where leaves hung dry and brown; then larger ones, a-flame with color.

But no yellow nor scarlet of autumn leaf could match the color of those forked flames, which he watched and admired till, all at once, terror seized him, and he fled from the forest. Still remembering, still watching that illuminated upper story yonder, it seemed as if he could still see miller Oliver Sands who was passing on the highroad as he came out upon it. The miller had spoken to him. Had asked why he looked so scared and why he ran as if somebody was pursuing. The fat miller with his slippery voice, so smooth, yet that had a sharp knife in its sound. It was this same Oliver Sands who had once sent him to the lock-up, with its iron-barred windows and its restraint upon his freedom. Freedom had been the breath of life to this poor outcast,

and he had felt he should die when imprisoned. He shuddered, still recalling those dark hours.

Then Seth Winters had come to see him, had brought him nice food, and had set him free again just by talking to the jailer. He wished Seth Winters was here now, that wise man who could explain everything. He would tell him what that strange glow meant and — Why, there was a light showing through all the windows of all the bedrooms, and not of that corridor one alone, where — a forked flame shot up!

"Jim! Jim!"

The sleeper felt himself shaken out of his chair, to his feet, by a frenzied grasp that he instantly resented.

"Let me alone! None of your business if I can't dance! Why — who — where —"

Then he was dragged to the window and realized that he was still in Peter Piper's kitchen and that he was being commanded to: "Look! Look!"

"My — soul! A fire!" gasped Jim and dashed from the room.

"Dorothy — Dorothy!" wailed the other, with a cry like some wounded animal; and "Dorothy, little Dorothy!" echoed Jim's trembling lips.

Then out upon the frosty air rang a girl's shriek. A shriek that was taken up and repeated from point to point, as one after another hapless sleeper aroused to the peril which confronted her. So soundly had all slept, after their unusual late retiring, that none discovered the beginning of the fire, nor could any

in the least comprehend it now nor its menace to life.

Only one person now rallied to the necessity for coolness and self-control. "Happy Maggie" it was who sped from room to room amid the smoke and darting flames, bidding:

"Fall into line, young ladies! Remember your fire drill! One — two — three — To the stairs — Shut your eyes — Don't wait to dress — One — two — three — March, steady, double-quick — *March*!"

It was Molly Breckenridge's hysterical laugh, at Maggie usurping a teacher's place, which started that retreat. Why if anybody could laugh while those flames were already creeping close and closer, it couldn't be so bad a case, it might be all a dream and part of the pageant of the earlier night! So, far more calmly than might have seemed possible, the white night-robed figures gathered on the stairs and like a flock of fleeing ghosts sped downward toward safety in the outside grounds.

By this time others besides the two lads had discovered the Academy in flames and swift alarms had been sent in, so that clanging engines, galloping horses, and the hoarse shouts of the firemen as they placed their ladders and turned on their hose-pipes drowned all other noises.

"The Rhinelander is burning!"

All over the sleeping, hillside city, the tidings flashed. The institution of which every citizen was proud, which stood for the best in womanly culture, was in danger, and people flocked into the slippery streets

anxious to be of help or moved by pitying curiosity.

At Brentnor Hall the excitement caught.

"Those girls! So gay, so pretty, so safe — such a little while ago! Come on, fellows, maybe there's something we can do!" cried Monty Stark with all his dandyism gone and only eager pity in his face.

"Come on!" they did; without asking or waiting leave, and added their boyish figures to the throng about the burning building, kept back from danger by the policemen's tight-stretched ropes. But when did a rope restrain a lad bent upon rescue? They were over and under it, a motley swarm of all sizes, some fully clothed, some in pajamas and bed-slippers, but none aware of what his neighbor wore or of anything save the red peril yonder.

"The front's all safe enough for now. It's the back — the dormitories! Come on, fellows!"

Again it was little Monty leading the way, for well he knew it, having frequently made surreptitious visits to the gymnasium adjoining, there to hold a brief "pin-feather flirtation" with some girlish admirers. His knowledge stood him in good stead now. Behind the screening spruce-trees, where no police nor firemen lingered, he and his followers ran till they came to a barricade of engines between them and the house.

There all halted except this young descendant of a doughty general, who somehow managed to gain a basement window and plunge through it into the room beyond. Here the fire was less fierce. It had fol-

lowed the outer wall upwards, along the defective flue that had caused the catastrophe, and though even here the smoke was suffocating the floor still held. It was through this room that the fleeing girls had passed to safety, to be caught up by willing hands outside and helped on to any shelter nearest.

All save one. At that supreme moment Dorothy alone had remembered a missing figure. Miss Greatorex! Her room was upon that upper floor near Dorothy's own and if she had wakened she would certainly have been in the midst, doing her duty as faithfully as ever. But it hadn't been she who had led them. It had been Maggie. Then another memory; that the poor subordinate had not attended the *musicale* because she had been ill in bed. She was a frail thing, at best, with more energy than strength. Dorothy shuddered. Then she ran to the door leading into the flame-encircled hall and stairway and shuddered again, covering her eyes with her hands to shut out the fearsome sight.

But — to leave a human being to die alone — *she could not!*

"Dorothy! Dorothy, is that you? Come back! For God's sake don't turn that way! This is the right — are you mad with fear?"

Monty Stark heard that voice and appealing cry and realized that he was not alone in that smoke-clouded basement room; that a girl, that Dolly girl who had played so sweetly and "sauced" him so outrageously, had also been there; that she had gone,

was going, speeding for life or death up those still standing, yet flaming stairs, for some wild reason of her own, and that this other boy was following, entreating, hopelessly persuading.

"Huh! stand aside! This isn't a time for fooling! If she won't come back of her own accord — *just make her!*"

Just as he was springing through the smoke up that stairway whither Dorothy had vanished, Jim Barlow felt himself pushed aside and saw a rather squat, short youth in curious attire dash past him and upward. But the surprised lad was swinging onward again and disappearing on the floor above without the wasting of a second.

"Dorothy! DOR-O-THY!"

"Here! Here, Jim, Monty — anybody! Here — quick — quick! This way — the precious 'Grater'— Oh! come!" And after that cry — silence.

CHAPTER XV

WINTER ON THE MOUNTAIN

On a hospital bed poor Peter Piper lay dying. Yet not poor, it may be, since soon there would come light into his dull brain and rest for his wandering feet.

The pounding hoofs of the galloping engine-horses had struck him down on the night of the Academy fire, and had done that injury to his head from which he could never recover. Yet, oddly enough, in so harming him they had also partially cured him. The shock had in some manner set free his thoughts and made him understand more fully than ever in his life all that went on about him.

Presuming on his stupidity the doctors and nurses had not hesitated to speak before him of his scant chances for recovery, but he had not been so stupid as they thought. He knew what death meant. He had feared it sometimes, from violence of enemies, from danger of fire or flood, but not now that it had come so near. He was so very, very tired; and he would rest. Like a pet pigeon he had once nursed till it, too, rested forever. It had looked so peaceful and so pretty, its white feathers all unruffled and it-

self hungry or thirsty no more. But before he fell asleep like his pigeon he wanted to see Dorothy; so now the only plaint he made was "Dorothy. Dorothy." Just that persistent, pleading "Dorothy."

"Yes, Peter-boy, I'm here;" came at last her dear voice into his dulled hearing, and the touch of her soft hand upon his own, lying outside the coverlet and plucking, plucking all the time at those imaginary flowers.

She was a greatly altered "Dorothy," indeed, all scorched and scarred from the ordeal through which she had passed; her pretty hair and curling lashes burned off, but still with the wide open brown eyes as bright as ever and the sweet lips as gently smiling.

But as she looked at the poor head on the pillow, bandaged and plastered, and the wan face beneath, the smile died and into the dark eyes came the forbidden tears.

"The lad has called for you, over and over, miss, so we sent for you to quiet him; but you must show no emotion before him or it will make him worse," the nurse had said and would not allow even Mother Martha, who had accompanied Dorothy hither, to enter the room where Peter lay alone.

Because it was not permitted by his now many friends that he should share a public or charity ward, where the sight of others' suffering would pain him too. So he had been placed in the very best of the private rooms, and Miss Penelope had seen to it that he should have a special nurse, and all the comforts

possible. A strange ending for a life that had been so obscure and uncared for at its beginning.

"Dolly?"

"Yes, Peter-boy. I hope you don't suffer much pain."

He did not answer this but drawing his hand away from hers fumbled restlessly in the bosom of the wrapper he wore.

The nurse drew near as he did this and he looked entreatingly toward her, murmuring "Bag, bag."

"Whatever does he mean? Can you guess, Miss Dorothy? He has done that before and more than once. He seems to want something but there is no bag of his here, that I know of."

"Did you undress him, nurse?" asked the girl.

"No. An orderly did that. I didn't even begin to take care of him until yesterday, when Miss Penelope Rhinelander requested the superintendent to make me his 'special.' Why?"

"Because I think I can guess what he misses and wants. He always wore a little leather bag, old and patched, inside his blouse. He kept his 'treasures' in it and I used often to tease him about it when he lived with us. Do you want your little brown bag, Peter-boy?"

"Yes. Yes. My bag is gone. Get my bag, Dorothy. I shan't want it any more and you shall have it because — because —" he paused, looked puzzled, and then joyfully explained: "Because I am your 'shadow.' When the sun is out there's always a

shadow, Dolly-girl. My bag for you since I'm your 'shadow.'"

"I'll inquire about it, but don't let him agitate himself, miss, while I am away. He has been very weak, to-day," said the nurse, as she quietly left the room.

When she had gone Peter closed his eyes and lay patiently waiting. Dorothy fancied he had fallen asleep and softly drew out her handkerchief and put it to her eyes from which, at last, the tears would fall in spite of all her will.

But the lad was not asleep. He saw her movement and said:

"I'm sorry somebody has hurt you, Dolly. Peter — Peter has some of the little pig left in his bag. You shall have it, Dolly, 'cause — I guess 'cause I don't get hungry any more. Such a pretty pigeon. Such a good girl. Will you stay all the rest the time with your 'shadow,' Dorothy?"

And to quiet his rising excitement she hastily promised "Yes."

Then the nurse came back and smilingly held up her hand, in which the missing article was seen. Both Peter and Dorothy recognized it at once, though its dinginess had increased since last she saw it, so that she shrank from touching it when the sick boy caught and thrust it into her hand.

"Yours, Dolly. Pretty things inside. All for you, Dolly, when I go to sleep with the pigeon. A stone hit that and made it — tired. Something hit me when I — when — I — was running to get you out — out

— Don't let the fire hurt Peter Piper, Dorothy! I can't run and hide any more, because — I — am — so tired — so — tir — ed."

The raucous voice grew weaker and weaker and the last syllable was but a whisper. When it had ceased Peter drew a long, satisfied sigh, then lay very, very still.

For a very brief time there was perfect silence in the room. Then the nurse arose and, taking Dorothy's hand in hers, said gently:

"It is all over. Our poor lad will suffer no more."

"Do you mean that — that he is — dead!"

"Yes, dear. Come away now, to your mother."

"Oh! the poor fellow! Poor, lonely, afflicted Peter Piper! I — I cannot bear it, to have him go like that. I didn't know I loved him so well; and to think he was trying to get to me, trying to save me from the fire, when he was hurt! It is too awful!"

"I think it is a sweet and blessed thing, Miss Dorothy. We called him 'simple' and a 'half-wit,' and disdained him because he wasn't so wise as some. But, consider for an instant, he's wiser now than the wisest living man in all the world. He has passed beyond and he *knows* what the rest of us can only *guess* at. Look at his face again. See? How quiet and happy it is, clothed in the majesty of Death. Come, now, your work here is finished."

It was the girl's first experience of this kind and she felt it keenly. Afterwards Dorothy wrote a letter to her beloved Mr. Winters, now convalescing in

the hospital, and in it gave him a history of most that had occurred since the evening of the musicale which had ended so disastrously; and this is what he read, sitting in his quiet room so far removed from his beloved mountain.

"Dear, Darling Mr. Winters:

"There has so much happened lately that I hardly know where to begin, but think I'd better at that *musicale* to which I sent you an invitation, that you didn't accept. Dear! how can I jest even that much when — when —

"The entertainment was a great success, everybody said. I couldn't have imagined anything so fine. There were lots of flowers and people and a band, and fine clothes, and things to eat. You're so old and grown-up you can guess about it better than I can tell. Only, I must let you know that Herr von Peters, who's the music or violin master at the Academy, thought I could play well enough to do my little part in entertaining and I did. I was frightened to do it, first off, till I knew how glad my friends would be if I played well. So I tried, and that's enough about that part.

"It was as late as late when we all got to bed and to sleep; and it didn't seem two winks before we were waked by our whole dormitory being on fire. We all got out safe, though, even if we didn't have time to put our clothes on. Only one teacher, Miss Greatorex, was forgotten and would have perished because she was ill, and deaf, and sound asleep, any-

way. Lucky! I happened to remember in time and went back to wake her, and Jim Barlow who'd been out in Peter Piper's kitchen — that I wrote you had been fixed and given to him for a home — Well, Jim saw the danger and came to help. A boy named Monty Stark came, too, and between us all we got Miss Greatorex out. The boys carried her in their arms, Jim her head and Monty her feet, and I crept down along the floor where the smoke wasn't so bad; and others came and helped us around to the big front building that didn't burn, and into the great rooms where the party had been. Such a funny lot of people we were! All us girls in our 'nighties'— and some of those Brentnor boys in theirs. 'Pajamas,' Molly said they were, and that Monty Stark, that's an 'exquisite,' and a dandy, other times, had on bright pink ones and pink knitted-slippers, same color. But he didn't seem to know it nor care, nor did anybody else, till Miss Rhinelander fetched a raincoat of her own, from somewhere and put it around him. Then, course, we girls scampered out of sight, into the music rooms and anywhere we could, laughing and crying both, we were so glad we had escaped that peril; and nobody knowing what we should do for other clothes because all of us who roomed in the 'old' part had lost ours. Till, the teachers said there'd be no trouble about that. The girls who roomed in the new building would lend us theirs, and that in the morning other things could be bought ready-made.

"So nobody was so very unhappy till — How can I bear to write it! Dear, brave, unselfish Peter Piper was the only one out of those threatened people who was hurt. The engine horses trampled him, and we buried him yesterday under the reat Balm of Gilead tree behind your smithy. All the mountain people came and many from other places. His grave was covered with flowers and — I can't write any more about that. But that last day when he was in hospital and wanted me he gave me his old leather bag — You remember it, don't you? He said there were 'pretty things' in it, but I wanted to give it back to him only father wouldn't let me. I felt as if he would be lonely even in his coffin without his treasures.

"What we finally did with it was to put it in your desk that you gave Jim Barlow the key of. We knew it would be safe there and wouldn't be at the farm, maybe. Because my father and mother are going away from there for nobody knows how long.

"We are all at home together now and Molly Breckenridge is with me. The school had to be closed for a little while, on account of the fire and the damage. Miss Rhinelander decided she would simply 'put the Easter holidays forward a few weeks' and that when Easter vacation came she would go right on teaching. She said that was the most just way to her patrons she could think of. So we all scattered and Molly came home with me.

"Mr. Miller Oliver Sands has turned the Martins out of their house and taken it back to himself. I don't

understand how exactly, only they owed him money and couldn't pay it. The diphtheria is over long ago, though I haven't been here since it was so prevalent, because my parents were afraid; but this is a last visit and — That's another thing I daren't write about — much. Only to tell you that it's to some wonderful Sanitarium my Father John is going, where they claim they can cure such lamenesses as his. There's enough money now coming from the mineral water and things to pay his way, so he and mother think he shouldn't miss trying, even if he isn't cured.

"Mother is going back to Baltimore, to live with my father's old aunt who needs her; and they are going to let the Martins come to our place to live while they're away, to farm it and take care of everything. Mr. Sands isn't pleased, my mother thinks; but she says he is a selfish man who doesn't like anybody to succeed except himself. I can remember when she felt differently about him, but everybody changes, seem if.

"If my father has to stay a long time at that Sanitarium this dear home won't be mine again till he comes back; and he has arranged with Miss Rhinelander that my vacations shall be spent with her, in traveling, or living in the country, or wherever is best. Seems queer a girl can't say what she wants to do herself and just do it; and when I begged to go to father at the Sanitarium, next summer, he just sighed and said 'No.' He said that there were others who had a better right than he to decide my life, although

it almost broke his heart to be separated from his 'Sunshine.' When I asked to go to Baltimore with mother she said 'no,' too, and she said it a good deal harder than Father John did. 'She wouldn't interfere with anybody, even though she had had all the care and trouble of raising me.'

"Oh! hum! I wish I knew who I am! And I should certainly devote my life to finding out, if I hadn't so faithfully promised you that I wouldn't 'poke' into the mystery.

"Now I must stop this long, long letter; only just to tell you one thing more. There's lots of snow here now, and the boys from the mountain, both sides, and from the two villages have made the long hill road the splendidest place in the world for coasting. It's as smooth as a toboggan slide, almost, and you can start from the top and coast way to lower village, and clear through it across the street and down the slope beyond, even on the ice in the river.

"The Smith boys are about wild over it. They go coasting every chance they get, and we've planned the greatest fun for to-morrow. It's Jim's day for coming to the smithy to see after Owen and to get any mail for you that may have come. So we've sent him word to be early and we'll all go coasting. The boys have the longest 'bobs' you ever saw. Some of them will hold a dozen; and when they get started down that tremendous hill they go like lightning. Mother isn't sure it's safe, but I want Molly to have a good time and neither she nor I ever had such coasting

in our lives. She never had a bit, even though I used to slide down some of the sloping blocks, winters in Baltimore — when we happened to have any snow, and I had a sled, and was let!

"Alfy's been 'most every day and hasn't been hurt yet. The only trouble I'm afraid of is from the 'districters.' The silly things think it's smart to keep up that old feud between south-side and north-side, even so long after it began and when there's only their own school left; and *that* not keeping now because Mr. Wilmot's wife is worse and he can't leave her. They just claim that they were the first to make the slide good and that our side the mountain hasn't any right to use it. The other side boys did bring water, drawing it in barrels from Perpetual Spring just beyond the Great Balm and turned the water over the road, making it one glare of ice; and, course, that is what helps the coasting so. The grown-ups don't like it, though, and Owen Bryan says he doesn't believe you'd permit it if you were here. It makes it so bad for the horses, which the smith can't keep 'sharpened' at all, hardly. Maybe you wouldn't allow it; but — you aren't here and the coasting is; and — I do hope to-morrow will be as bright as bright!

"Now, good night, at last, my dear, dear Mr. Winters. I am trying to be as near what you'd like me to be as I can, though I fall short of it most always. I never could, and I'm afraid I never can, get my thinking to come before my doing. But I'll keep on trying and I hope you'll soon be willing to tell me just who

and what I am. That is if you know, as Molly and I have decided you do. If you see dear Mrs. Calvert, please give her my love and I would like to write to her, if I thought she'd like to have me.

"My parents send their kind regards and best wishes for your recovery; and I am, as always, your loving, faithful

"DOROTHY (without a tail to her name)."

The morrow did prove "as bright as bright," as Dorothy expressed it in her childish way, and under such a brilliant sunshine and looking out on such a glittering world even Mother Martha's anxieties disappeared. Always somewhat flattered by association with "the rich," the presence of Molly Breckenridge beneath her roof made her very happy and satisfied, and determined to give that young person the greatest pleasure possible. She explained to her husband after the young folks had gone to bed:

"I've planned the nicest sort of a surprise for our girls and their friends. I wrote at the bottom of Dolly's note to Jim, though she didn't know I had, that if there were any nice boys he knew and would like to bring with him I'd be pleased to have them. I'm going to give them a hot picnic dinner in Seth Winters's old kitchen. Owney Bryan's hand-in-glove about it, too, with me. I got Littlejohn to kill some chickens to-night, and Alfy's been out to the barn and picked 'em all unbeknownst. I've got a lot of mince pies baked and plenty of bread and butter; and I'll make a pot of cocoa here at home, so's all there'll

be to do when we want dinner is to heat it up. I'm going to take molasses, too, so the youngsters can have a candy-pull, after they've done coasting, if they want."

"Why, Martha dear! What a lot of trouble you're taking. Are you sure you're not doing too much?" asked Father John, secretly delighted yet wholly astonished.

"John, dear, tell me this: Can a body do too much for such a girl as Dorothy? Who didn't hesitate one second to rush back into them raging flames to save a teacher who'd been so hateful to her —"

"But never, never will be again, if I'm a judge of human nature!" he interrupted.

"And that Jim Barlow who wasn't afraid to risk his own life either, and that other one what Molly thinks is so terrible brave — I do just hope he'll come, too. I'll admire to see such a boy as that, as them; though, of course, we shall see Jim always, more or less.

"And John, now the time draws so nigh that you and me and our darling girl will be separated so far and wide, I — I — just want to have one good time to remember this dear place by. I came here unwilling and unhappy and I've learned to love the queer old house and the farm I called so lonesome; so that it almost breaks my heart to go away and say good-by to it and — and everything!"

Down went her head and down coursed the regretful tears; while her equally unhappy husband could

do no more than stroke her hair and grieve in silence beside her.

But this had been on the night before; and on this radiant morning, when the whole world lay white and spotless, and every twig and tree was a-sparkle, there was no sign of sorrow on the farm wife's comely face. She and Alfaretta had been long astir before the two schoolmates roused in their chamber above. Fowls had been roasted "to a turn," and to account for the savory odors of the kitchen one had been placed upon the breakfast table.

Father John was already driving out of the yard, with Portia dragging a well-laden cutter, when Dorothy spied him from the window and demanded:

"Why, where's father going so early?"

Her mother laughed and pointed to the clock; at which both the delinquents also laughed, while Alfaretta sped around serving them so eagerly and so gaily that Dorothy laughed again, remembering:

"That first day you came here, Alfy dear, we little thought that you'd ever be hostess in my place! Seems if lots of things have turned themselves topsy-turvy, doesn't it? But, ah! Molly! doesn't my mother's breakfast beat those of Rhinelander Acad.? You must eat all you can, girlie, because it'll soon be over — the chance — and we back to our mush and 'high thinking.'

"Oh! what a glorious day it is! What fun, what fun we shall have! I hope Jim won't fail to come, but even if he does, there'll be Littlejohn and Dan and

Alfy and us. If only those horrid south-siders stay at home for once!"

"They'll not do that!" declared Alfaretta, with emphasis. "And we know what we know, don't we, Mis' Martha!" she finished, rolling her eyes and shrugging her shoulders in a fashion that made Dolly ask:

"What's going on, folkses, that we aren't in? What you up to, Alfy Babcock?"

"Up to clearing off your dirty dishes and getting you to hurry up and put on your things. Littlejohn and Dan have been out there by the barn this ever so long and they must be 'most froze. Do hurry. Why, Mis' Martha, I'd as soon stay and help as — as — well, almost as lief —" faltered the girl, ruefully regarding the still unwashed dishes, then glancing outward to where the Smith boys were waiting with a wonderful 'bob,' almost as long as that of the south-siders over which Mike Martin had authority.

"Pooh! Nonsense. As if I couldn't give you a holiday now and then. Besides, nobody knows when you and Dorothy will ever romp together again. Go get on your coat and hood, and don't forget those red mittens I knit you. And, Alfy, I lay it upon *you* to see to it that in your coasting you keep close to the inside of the road. Don't you let Littlejohn go near the edge, where the mountain drops down so steep, into the lower road and ravine. It's steeper a good deal than the roof of this house, and deep — My heart! I've often thought what a terrible thing it would be if

a horse and wagon rolled over that bank, or some these reckless coasters went a mite too near. Will you promise?"

"I promise I'll try; but — but — sometimes when one 'bob' is try — bound to pass the other the boys don't stop to think, but just rush past, swish! edge or no edge. But don't you worry, Mis' Martha. There hasn't ever an accident happened and 'tisn't likely there will to-day. More especial if Jim's on hand. He wouldn't let our 'bob' take any risks, with Dolly and Molly aboard."

"And you, too, Alfy. He'd be as careful of you as of them," said her mistress reassured.

"Mebbe," said Alfaretta, who never set an undue value upon herself as compared with her idol, Dorothy. "But don't you worry. And I'm — I'm to be the one to say *when,* aren't I?"

"Sure. You're my helpful little 'mistress of ceremonies.' Twelve o'clock, sharp, in Seth Winters's kitchen at the old smithy. Seems almost as if Peter Piper would be there too, he lies so near, poor lad! John and I will be ready for you, everything all hot and tasty, and here come the girls. Mum 's the word. Let it be a grand surprise."

Out into the snowy yard the three girls hurried; two of them in dainty cloaks and furs, and one in the most comfortable if rather clumsy and ill-chosen wraps. But what mattered mere clothing? Alfy's green coat, blue hood, and red mittens, were only so much more color added to the winter landscape; while

Molly's ermine-trimmed white and Dorothy's soft chinchilla admirably toned down the other's glarishness.

Awkward at first, the Smith boys soon forgot their shyness, and at a loud "Halloo!" from somewhere in the distance flung up their caps and yelled a greeting in return.

"Jim Barlow! Driving the minister's cutter! and Monty — dear, darling Monty Stark is with him!" cried Molly, clapping her hands. "To have my first coasting in company with two life-savers! Oh! that'll be something worth while to write my precious Daddy!"

Dorothy was equally pleased if somewhat surprised; till she reflected that ever since that night of mutual peril in the flames, the lads so unlike had been the best of friends. Indeed, Molly had declared, that their friendship bade fair to be as "chummy" as their own.

Their arrival caused a brief delay, while James carefully put up the borrowed horse in the Skyrie stable and blanketed it warmly. Then, too, he would run into the house for just another moment to speak to Mrs. Martha, who bade him:

"Be off now, before the south-siders get ahead of you and try any mean tricks. John's at the forge. You're sure to see him, for that's the best starting point, I understand. Good-by, and a happy morning to you all!"

There were some level places where the lads got off

and dragged the "bob," the girls remaining seated; and there were others where they could coast in a slow fashion; so that it was an easy trip to the smithy and that finer starting point. Immediately beyond this spot the road dipped suddenly and smoothly, very like that toboggan slide to which Dorothy had likened it.

"Good! No south-siders in sight! The hill 's our own alone! Hurray! Hurray!" shouted Littlejohn, and Monty shivered a little at the yell so close to his ears.

The next moment they were off! and this time he shivered in actual fear. New England born though he was, in a land where snows lie long, he had yet been so girlishly reared that like Molly, he was having his first experience of this most bracing exercise.

How the wind rushed through their lungs! How the sharp air set their cheeks a-tingle! How fast — how fast, how far, how dangerously close to passing vehicles they sped! as they flashed downward into the village at the mountain's foot, through it, down its further hill-street, out — out upon the river — the wide, ice-bound river, where many teams were crossing as if upon the earth itself.

Then the long, long climb back to the top. By the time they reached it, dragging the heavy "bob," they were all very weary and very warm.

"Glorious!" said Monty, panting for breath. "But I tell you fellows, I can improve. I saw a livery stable down below. Next time I'll hire a sleigh to haul us up, and then this sport will be perfect!"

"Fine, fine!" cried Molly and Dolly, together. But Alfaretta looked doubtful, and Montmorency Vavasour-Stark was slightly disappointed. As disappointed as he could be by such a common looking young lady as Miss Alfaretta Babcock.

"You do not seem to agree with us, Miss Alfaretta. Do you prefer to walk back every time? If so I suppose you will compel us to do the same."

"Compel nobody. But it ain't fair. If the south-siders see us do it it'll make 'em mad as hatters. Then they'll likely try to interfere. If they do 'twon't be safe. That there ravine — I promised Mis' Martha —"

"O, Alfaretta!" protested Molly, who didn't like to walk, especially on such a slippery hill.

Monty didn't like walking either, and this aided his gallantry to succeed; so with an assuring smile toward Molly he decided:

"Of course, Miss Babcock, I'm sorry to go against your wishes, but those of the majority should prevail, I suppose."

Alfy was really troubled and angry that this "dandy stranger" should prevent their "playing fair." No other "bobs" were ever drawn up by a horse, except on the accident of some good-natured, passing teamster. All the coasters did their own hauling which gave to all the same opportunity and number of slides This was the unwritten law of the mountain where this girl had been reared and whose every code she fully understood. The south-siders were inclined to

mischief anyway and give them a rightful chance they'd certainly improve it.

So she merely stared an instant at Master Stark, looked him coolly over from his seal-skin cap to his fur lined over-shoes, and impudently observed:

"Huh! I didn't think 'twas time for straddle-bugs to be out, yet. But I don't care to coast no more. I'll stay here to the shop and you can do as you like. But, hear me, Dorothy. If there's trouble with Mike Martin's crowd don't you dare say I didn't warn you. I've been sliding down this mounting and climbing up again ever since I was knee-high to a hop-toad, and I know what I'm telling. Good-by. I shan't slide no more."

With that this decided young person walked away, swiftly and scornfully; and after a brief pondering upon her advice the others declined to follow it.

So they settled themselves upon their "bob" and started downward again, resolved to achieve an easy way of returning; and all well satisfied to have one well-to-do person among them, even though Master Montmorency Vavasour-Stark did display his well-filled pocketbook with a rather pompous air.

"Glad of it, Monty. Must be queer to have whole dollar bills and things all the time. Poor *I* never have a cent, and I'm what Miss Penelope calls 'worse off than nothing' because I'm always in debt to some girl or other. Never mind. I don't care — not much; only sometimes I'd like to be able to give things when others do. Like the flowers for Peter Piper's — No,

Dolly, I didn't mean to speak of him on such a gay morning. But — Hold on! I — I'm not half ready yet!" said Molly, as the sled began to slide and Littlejohn Smith cried his caution:

"Ready, all! Take care — sit tight — here she goes!"

All went as Monty had planned. An idle rig, already hitched up at the livery, was put to his service and the girls were placed in the sleigh while the lads rode upwards on the "bob," drawn behind the sleigh, all exceedingly gay and full of contempt for Alfaretta's caution.

Later, they were all to remember it in a different mood, and sorrowfully to regret that they had not followed her advice, instead of Monty's easy plan.

CHAPTER XVI

A COASTING AND A COMPACT

THAT Saturday, a holiday by rights of all youngsters, the south-siders were out in force.

By the time the north-side party had again reached the top of the mountain and that level place before Seth Winters's shop from which descent began, the road was a-swarm with "districters."

There was Mike Martin with his mighty "bob," as well as Frazer Moore and his brothers, Molly Martin and Jane Potter, and every other girl who could persuade her mother to give her a morning for fun. Big boys and little boys; big sleds and little ones; and several of home manufacture, made by strips of wood nailed to two barrel staves.

A shout that was almost a roar greeted the arrival of the north-siders and Alfaretta appeared in the doorway of the forge, recognizing at once the defiance in the sound. No time was lost in preliminaries. Mike Martin strode up to Littlejohn Smith, shaking his fist and demanding:

"How long you fellers been using our slide? You clear right out, do you hear?"

"Oh! I hear, but I don't fear," returned the lad,

defiantly, as he unfastened his sled from the back of the sleigh that had drawn it up the mountain and made it ready for another "coast."

Backed by Jim Barlow and this finely-clad stranger, as well as his own brother Dan, he felt fully equal to anything that might happen. Even a fight, if that ensued, and except for the presence of so many girls he rather hoped it would. As he mumbled to Jim:

"I've been hankering and fair sufferin' to punch that rowdy's nose! And I wish he'd give me the chance right here and now. Couldn't be a better time to settle old scores. If it wasn't for them plaguey girls I'd pitch right in and lam him this minute."

"More fool you, then, Johnny. Fighting doesn't do any good. You'd hate each other just the same the minute it was over. Best way is to pay no attention to him and his bluster. Just go on as if he wasn't there at all," advised the peace-loving youth.

"Huh! That's all you know about it. Never coasted on this mountain before, did you?"

"No. Course not. But what's the use wranglin'? Dorothy begins to look scared already, though t'other one, that Molly — *our* Molly — perks her head up as if she'd like the fun. Odd! That there should be a Molly in both factions."

"Hmm. You've learned to use pretty big words since you took to studying for a business, Jim, but I wouldn't let that make me a coward if I was you!" retorted Littlejohn, at whom Mike was now making horrible faces as well as prancing around on the snow

after the fashion of a fine lady, as he imagined. His purpose was to suggest to Littlejohn that the latter was afraid to fight because some well-dressed girls were present and young Smith fully understood him.

Jim Barlow's face flushed and he was about to retort angrily, when something he had heard Seth Winters say returned to his mind. So though he was indignant enough he replied quite calmly:

"Being called a coward doesn't make a fellow one. Now, if you're ready, let's call the girls and come on. Alfy, won't you ride down again? Don't want to spoil the sport, do you?"

"No, I don't. But, Jim, I dassent. There'll be trouble, sure's you live. The south-siders has been here a good while now and they've been talkin' things over. I heard 'em through the window. Better tell 'em 'fore you start that you'll play fair and if they'll let you use their slide —'cause they really did do the most of it, even if this side the mountain does belong to us — you won't let no horse drag you up again and cut it rough with his hoofs. Tell 'em you'll take even turns and no more; and I guess — I guess, maybe —"

Her long speech and sage advice was wasted on the air. At the first negative shake of her head, Littlejohn had given the word, his party had settled solidly on his "bob," and they were off.

Then more swiftly than it seemed possible, every boy who belonged to Mike's group had sprung to his place and the south-side "bob" was racing the other with a reckless disregard of danger.

Fortunately that trip down was made in safety, and the horse and sleigh which Monty had engaged for the upward pulls, trotted down in the rear. Yet the north-side party wondered why their opponents did not immediately start back up the hill instead of loitering along as close to themselves as they could without colliding. The horse had been engaged to meet them on the river bank, whither they would drag their own "bob" over the easy, level river-ice. But the explanation came when suddenly the south-siders darted to the side of the horse, and by a simultaneous movement whisked out their knives and cut the harness in a dozen places.

Then, instantly frightened by what they had done, foreseeing arrest there in the village, they darted away homewards at a pace the others could not equal for want of equal practice. Indeed, for a moment, they were too astonished to follow; till the blood of all the Starks rose in Montmorency's veins, and with a yell that seemed impossible to such a "Sissy," he started in pursuit. Behind him followed Jim's long legs and the shorter ones of the two Smith's; but they could not regain the moment lost in starting, and Mike had made the ascent before they were half way up.

Left behind, alone with the incensed driver of the sleigh, Molly and Dorothy shivered in fear. His language was not chosen for the ears of innocence and, feeling more like crying than laughing as some bystanders were doing, they also set off homewards, a sober and anxious pair.

"What do you suppose that liveryman will do? And why do you suppose boys are so — so *horrid*? Always ready for a fight?" asked Dolly.

"Give it up! Only I reckon they're born that way; and I guess — I guess I don't love boys quite so much as I thought I did. How that 'Starky' yelled! He might have been one of the Indians some of his ancestors fought with. I think he was perfectly — disgusting. I do so."

Alas! The glamour had gone from the day. It didn't seem as if the sun shone half so brightly as it had, and that mountain road was endless now. It's glistening, polished surface was almost impassable to their weary feet and again Molly wailed:

"They haven't left us even a little rough edge to walk on, they have coasted so all over the whole width. Anyhow, I know one thing. I shan't slide on anybody's old 'bob' again, never, never, never. I'm so tired, Dolly Doodles; and I'm so disappointed in Monty. I thought he was a regular hero but he isn't. He's just *plain boy!*"

The contempt she put into her words stung Dorothy into a momentary vindication of that other "hero," Jim; but she was cut short in her remark that "Jim didn't yell" by her chum's remarking:

"Suppose he didn't simply because he was so mad he couldn't. Some folks are built that way; and anyhow, he *ran!* He was ahead, chasing the Martin lot. and actions speak louder than words. Oh! he's a mere boy too. I'm disappointed in the pair of them

and I hope they'll go back to town without coming near us again."

Dorothy said no more. She was dismayed by what had happened, afraid of what might yet follow, and in some way felt that she was to blame for the whole incident. If she had added her persuasions to Alfaretta's Molly and Monty would have yielded the point of hiring the sleigh, and if she had gone forward to greet the south-siders as old acquaintances, instead of holding herself aloof, she might have won them over to an equal courtesy.

"It never does pay to be nasty!" she sighed, when they paused for breath. "Father John says politeness is the 'oily-feather' that sets the rough things of life running smooth. If I'd only remembered that in time. But that's me! I never, never think till afterward and then it's too late!"

"So I've noticed," agreed Molly, unflatteringly.

"Well, if you have you needn't —"

"Be cross, eh? Well, honey, I won't. Though I might suggest that —"

"I am, too, girlie," laughed the other, ashamed to see that they two were fast approaching that obnoxious thing, a petty quarrel. "But — My heart! Look out, darling! Oh! Look out!"

Down the hill came the "High Flyer," Mike Martin's ponderous "bob." Its top the heaviest of planks, its runners the smoothest of polished steel, but its only occupants himself and his sister, Molly. The sled was propelled not only by its own weight but by

his furious anger as well. By the time he and his mates had reached the old forge, *their* anger had given place to fear concerning the consequences of their recent outrage against the liveryman. Nothing would tempt *them* to descend again into his neighborhood. Nobody but Mike had enough "dare devil" in him so to do, but he was so eager to triumph over Littlejohn and the other north-siders that he was reckless.

A fleeting vision of his father's probable wrath deterred him for an instant only; then, when he found himself deserted of his followers, he turned to his sister Molly and ordered her to come.

Knowing nothing, as yet, of what had happened in the town below; indignant that all the boys should so desert her brother just because he seemed a "little mad;" and eager for a slide, she promptly took her place behind him on the plank, clasped her arms around his waist, shut her eyes the better to feel that delicious rush of air against her face, and off they shot faster than ever before and even more carelessly.

It was their swift descent, right into their very faces as it seemed, which halted the two friends ascending. At the same instant Mike perceived them and instinctively veered the "bob" aside.

It was at the very steepest point of the hill, and at that place which Mother Martha had spoken of so anxiously. On one side the mountain rose precipitously, and on the other — one scarcely dared to look into the depths below.

"Take care!" and "Clear road!" came the warn-

ings from both Dorothy and Mike, together, and — Too late!

Molly cast one glance toward the edge of the road where all three had disappeared in one instant, then covered her face with her hands, flung herself down in a heap and began to sob as if her heart were breaking. It wasn't the best way to help but it was a perfectly natural thing for her to do; and it was there that Jim and Littlejohn, returning for the "bob," they had deserted on the river bank, found her a little while afterwards.

"Why, Molly! Molly! What's the matter? Where's Dorothy?"

Molly's answer was a terrified screech. Then she sprang to her feet and pointed toward the ravine and screamed again.

The faces of both lads turned white. They understood without words and leaped across the narrow road to peer into the depths. What they saw seemed incredible. Against one of the crooked trees which grew on the side of the gulch Dorothy was braced. She was leaning over the depth, holding fast with both hands to Mike Martin's trousers, and had pulled them by their bottom edges so far off that his feet were hidden in them. He hung head downwards in another tree immediately below, into the branches of which his sister had been flung and where she clung in desperate case, indeed, but — right side up.

"Hold fast, Dolly! We're coming!"

However, she or they had gone down that icy, steep

bank, none of them could ever guess. Neither could they explain why the two Martins should have been precipitated into the trees, instead of the rocky road below. The freakishness of accident that often occurs, for so it was; and — They were only just in time.

Mike was already past consciousness from his terrible position and the rush of blood to his head, and Dorothy's strength had almost given out. Only Molly Martin, a born tree-climber, had landed safely enough among the rough cedar branches, and crouched there in terror, making sufficient outcry to make up for the others' utter silence.

Jim was in the tree, raising Mike's head with all his strength, while Littlejohn caught the lad's legs from Dorothy's grasp and helped to get the poor fellow into a normal position. The girl in the tree ceased her outcries and swiftly made her way to the ground and scrambled up the bank, while Dorothy rested her head against the tree trunk for a little time before she could follow her.

When they had all reached the road they paused to rally and consult.

"Shall we go down and get the sled and draw him up on it?" asked Littlejohn.

"'Twould take too long," said Jim. "He must be got to the forge. Seth left all sorts of medicines and things there and Owen Bryan will have a fire. Somebody will go for a doctor, if he needs one by then — if his neck isn't broke and he stone dead."

At that speech Dorothy's strange quietude gave way

and she shrieked as lustily as ever Molly Breckenridge.

"No, no, no! He isn't dead! He shan't be dead! We've had enough of death and dying and — misery! We'll carry him between us. I can help. I can. My arms are getting rested — some — though they feel as if they were loose at the shoulders."

Then the two Mollies looked at one another and shyly offered their own help, and so without further delay they started up the hill.

"Shucks! He's the heaviest thing I ever lifted!" exclaimed Jim, after they had mounted for some distance in silence.

"Let's lay him down and change ends of him;" suggested Littlejohn. "I'll carry his shoulder part. Wouldn't think he'd been so sick with the diphthery along back, would you? Why, he's fatter and likelier 'n he ever was. Drop him a minute, easy now."

"That's a good idea," said Jim.

So they laid him down and meant to do so gently; but an inadvertent slip of Jim's numb fingers let him fall rather heavily. The result was that Mike moaned and half-opened his eyes. But he did not fully rouse and relieved to find that he was alive, as Dorothy had not yet tried her hand at the carrying, she now offered to do so. Jim would have refused, ashamed to let a girl do a task he had imposed upon himself: but Molly Breckenridge suggested a plan that would be easy for all.

"Let's take off our coats, we three girls, and lay

him on them. The boys can take hold each side, up by his shoulders where he weighs a ton! We two Mollies will carry his legs on the second cloak, and Dolly Doodles can take his feet. That's what Miss Penelope calls a 'division of labor,' and — Seems as if I must laugh, spite of all, just to think he's alive and isn't broken!"

They followed her advice and thus luxuriously was Mike Martin conveyed to the smithy and the presence of what few south-siders were there left. Most of them had vanished homewards, when he left them. They had suddenly wearied of coasting; fearing that, at any moment, the face of the constable would appear on the upward way and themselves be brought to account for their village escapade.

Yet before that strange trip was over the boy had recovered his consciousness and the jolting had helped to jar the confusion from his brain; and he had not long been laid upon Owen Bryan's bed before he was quite himself.

It was queer, he thought, for Mother Martha to hurry into the room and ask him how he felt; and he rose weakly and awkwardly, ashamed to be caught thus lying. He was queer, too, himself. So dizzy when he remembered how he had landed in that tree and the struggles he had made to gain a hold of some branches and so pull himself upright. Then that girl had come, whom he had once locked in an empty barn with that half-witted youth, whom many people called a "crazy loon."

There she came again! He wished she wouldn't. He wished — Oh! bother!

"O, Mike! I am so glad to see you're all right again. My mother has made such a surprise for us and you must come and join us. We're to have a regular dinner in Seth's kitchen, and the two Mollies and Alfaretta can scarcely wait for us to come, too. I said 'No.' We shouldn't begin without the hero of the feast, and that's you, of course — to-day, after all — Eh? What? What — are — you — saying?"

"I'm sayin' I — I want you to forgive me, Dorothy, for all the meannesses I've ever done to you. You've gone and saved my life — yes you have. I heard more that them boys said, whilst they was a-luggin' me, than I — than they knew. It wasn't clear then but it's clear now. If you hadn't jumped down and held me till somebody came I'd be dead. And to do it to me — *me* — Do you know 'twas me that shut you up that time with Peter Piper and left you to starve —"

"O, Mike! How could you? Why should you?"

"'Cause I was a fool, nothin' short of plumb fool. I called it a joke but I hain't never got over bein' sorry about it. I can tell *you* but — but I can't tell *him*. Bein' so nigh death myself — I'm awful sorry," and he pointed weakly backward to the leafless branches of the Great Balm guarding the spot where Peter Piper slept.

When a lad like Mike Martin gives way to good feelings he does so completely. He scarcely dared

look toward Dorothy or to believe that after his confession she really would forgive what he now felt had been a crime, rather than a joke, against her. He was as humble as his father would have liked him to be — and that is saying much; and it was a surprise when Dorothy came and sat down on the bed's edge beside him and said:

"I forgive you, course, and I'm glad I happened to be just where I was when you fell and to think of doing what I did. That's all about that! Only, maybe, it wasn't a 'happen.' Dear Mr. Seth wouldn't call it so. He'd say it was just 'sent' to be a splendid chance to learn a new 'lesson.' He says that all life is 'schooling' and 'lessons,' and seems to me if 'tis, the one we ought to get out of this is — just 'bury the hatchet.' That would be a kind of burying that nobody could cry over."

"What you mean?" asked the boy, venturing to look at her, as she so eagerly clapped her hands and the light way in which she spoke of "burying."

"I mean this. Tell me. Listen. You're the best scholar in the new south-side school, aren't you? Think yourself the smartest and are, eh?"

"You needn't pitch into me and make fun," was the reply.

"I couldn't pitch if I tried. My arms still ache too much from carrying your big feet up the mountain. As for fun, I never was so serious. Listen again. You're the ring-leader of the — of the 'districters' (I was going to say rascals). You can make

them do anything you wish. Well, then, *do it.* You turn round and build that school up into the very best in the country. You'll go there, course, even after you move to our farm. You build a bridge of good neighborliness — My! what a long word but it means what I mean! — right over the top of this dear old mountain. You make it your own business to settle all this silly rivalry between 'sides,' and just be the 'mountain.' Hurrah! I've thought of the very thing. Call it the 'Heights!'"

"Pshaw! I couldn't. I —"

"You couldn't if you wouldn't, that's plain. But you could if you would and that's plain, too. Did you ever hear some person whistling a tune along the street? First you know some other fellow's whistling it too. Then a third one takes it up and, like as not, it will travel that way all over the city, and if it's a pleasant tune it makes everyone glad that hears it. Now you just learn to say 'Heights.' Stick to it, Every time you begin to say M — quit and say H. First you know, other folks 'll speak of the 'Heights.' 'Our Heights.' It's a nice, aristocratic sounding word and it means just the same thing as mountain, and nobody 'd ever twist their tongues around to say 'south-side heights.' Never."

"Does sound kind of purty," agreed Mike, when she gave him a chance to "get a word in edgewise." Also, his face had lost its look of shame and began to glow with something like pride. It was an ambition worth while, this bridging the rivalry between

" Sides," and making this glorious old mountain into a happy home for all.

" Pretty? I should say it was. It's more. It's beautiful, it's noble, and it's manly. It's what dear Mr. Seth has longed for and couldn't accomplish. But you can, because — Well, *because*; and that's the best reason a girl ever gives."

" I'll do it! I'll do it if it — it takes a leg!" cried this valiant young reformer and peace-maker.

" Course, you'll do it. I don't know when I shall ever come home again, except maybe just to say good-by. But I'll come sometime and when I do I shall find things just as I want. As Alfy says, 'I feel it in my bones.'"

They both rose and yet, for a moment, Dorothy did not go away. She looked outward to the Great Balm toward which Mike had nodded, and finally said:

" You were sorry you couldn't ask the laddie yonder to 'forgive' you also. Well, you can. By taking care of the spot where he lies, and by helping to keep this old smithy safe and ready for the dear man who was poor Peter's first and best friend. Owen Bryan is well enough but you are better.

" Now, I hear my mother calling and I've done preaching. So, Mike, let's just shake hands and go to dinner"

CHAPTER XVII

CONCLUSION

"THIS is the jolliest feast I ever had! It beats our *musicale,* it's better than a summer, out-door picnic, it's just perfect!" cried Molly Breckenridge, whose spirits were at the highest and whose nonsense kept everybody in Seth Winters's kitchen a-laugh. "But a candy-pull will be something to tell the girls of! I've heard of them, course, but I never had a hand in one before."

All the party, including the Martins, had eaten all they could of Mother Martha's bountiful supply of good things, and that happy hostess was busy clearing away the soiled dishes and packing her own into baskets, as well as putting into the cupboard whatever was left for Owen Bryan's use, later on. That rather lonely fellow kept "bachelor's hall" and his cooking was none of the best. So that this invasion of his quarters and the fine dinner he had been invited to join had made a delightful break in his monotonous life. But he had done well. He had kept sober, he had taken "the chance" Seth had provided, and he was once more a respected, if humble, member of the community.

It was he who set the fire roaring, who took his stand over it and stirred the boiling molasses without stopping once, until it had reached the right consistency and was declared by Molly Martin to be "just right." For she, more than her entertainers, was experienced in taffy making, having lived always in this colder climate where such sport was common. To them it was a novelty, and rather to Alfaretta's chagrin Martha said:

"Now Molly Martin, since Alfy was mistress of the dinner-party, I make you mistress of the candy-pull. Tell us what you need to use and just what we shall do and we'll obey. No, Alfy, you shall not wash a dish this day! I'll do them while you play with the others. We want to have the very happiest time possible. Listen to what Molly says."

"Well, ma'am, the first thing we do to home, when Ma lets us make taffy, is — to wash our hands. Clean as clean, and our nails and things all right. Then we butter our hands the leastest, littlest tiny bit, so the candy won't stick. Then we each take a roll of the candy and pull it out between our two hands as far as we can, then double it back and pull again, and we all try to see which can get it the very whitest. Like this."

Very proudly and happily she lifted a tin plate that had been buttered and into which a little portion of the boiled molasses had been poured. Owen had kept this over the fire till the right moment and not an instant longer; so that when the girl pushed up one

side of the plateful, it rolled into a plump stick, or chunk, and Molly Breckenridge begged to have first chance.

To every one a plateful was given and then the fun began in earnest and the rivalry to have each one's grow the palest. Jim Barlow and Mike Martin were the strongest and the swiftest; but poor Monty Stark came promptly to grief. He had not cooled his hands as the others had and he moved them so slowly that the candy began to cling to his fingers, drop to the floor or upon his clothes and make, as Alfy upbraided:

"A regular nasty mess! Just look at them boards, boy alive! No one wants to get down on their own hands and knees to scrub 'em to-day, or any other day! You better give it up and let somebody else pull your share. Look out, Dolly! You're steppin' right into one them lumps he's spilt. Oh, pshaw! If I didn't know enough to pull candy I'd — I'd hide my head in the closet!"

"All right. But you couldn't use anybody else's hands and knees, could you?"

Alfy was, at heart, only too glad to find some manner of fault about this lad who had disdained her earlier in the day. However, he did not resent her advice, being much of that same mind, and most meekly held forth his hands for her to remove the sticky "mess."

"All right. I'll clean you, but you've got to come outdoors to have it done. I'll wash you in the snow

and dry you on Owney's roller-towel, and then you'd better set down and rest. Your kind of a boy — huh! Just look at Mike's and Jim's! That's the way candy ought to be pulled, quick-as-a-wink, not diddle-d-a-dd-le, your way!"

"Alfaretta!" warned Martha, afraid that their guest would be offended.

But not he. Despite his effeminacy he was a gentleman and entered into the amusement of his hosts with great good nature, although privately he thought he would rather have provided them with the most expensive confections than have daubed himself in such wise. And they were all so happy! Putting aside, for the time being, all thought of the coming separation and that this would be the last time they should meet in the dear old smithy for many a day to come.

Then when the candy had been "pulled" to a creamy whiteness, cut into manageable pieces for eating, and set out of doors to cool, they gathered in the forge to watch Owen at his work. By then the dusk was falling and he, too, laid aside his leather apron and sat down to listen to the "ghost stories" for which Molly Breckenridge had pleaded.

The light from the forge fire fell on that row of listeners, tinging their features with a Rembrandt-like glow, against the background of the smoke-stained rafters and walls of the old shop. It was an hour of quiet after that hilarious day, and somehow held a bit of sadness in it; so that when Molly again begged Dorothy C., the "story-teller" of the party, for

"Something real creepy and goose-fleshy, Dolly dear! So queer of us to be grouped like this, in an old blacksmith shop, on top of a mountain, with only the flames yonder to make our faces look so odd and spooky! A ghost-story, honey, and make it — make us think it's true!"

"Second the motion!" cried Monty, clapping his candy-blistered hands, then crying "Ouch!" in very girlish fashion.

"All right, girlie, because the only ghost story I can think of to-night is a really, truly one. Some of you know it, already, but they won't mind hearing it again because they loved the ghost — though they didn't know it then. The rest of you must listen quietly and not make fun; for it seems to me while I think of him that my ghost is here, right in the center of this fire-lit circle."

The two Mollies snuggled together, shuddering delightfully, but Alfaretta kept an incredulous eye upon the narrator, wondering if she had ever seen a "truly Haunt," until the tale began and convinced her.

It was the story of Peter Piper which Dorothy told; from his first appearance at the farm through all the days that followed, but dwelling most especially upon his really ghost-like helpfulness in her parents' earliest farming. She pictured her own fear of him, the remarkable change in the garden, that "had gone to bed weedy and waked up weeded," and the final revelation of his identity in the south meadow when he had proved so helpful.

"Seems as if he must hear us and know that we're speaking about him to-night. Anyway, he died nobly, trying to save human life. And he died happy, too, I believe. He looked so contented, so almost handsome after he had put that little brown bag in my hand and he turned then upon his pillow to — go to sleep."

They were all silent for a time; then said Mike, the inquisitive:

"Where's it at, that bag, Dorothy? Have you got it now?"

"Why, of course, I have it. That is, I mean I shall never part with it. And Jim, that reminds me that it is in your charge and Owen's now, since we put it away in Mr. Winters's desk in the room beyond."

"Pshaw! How I'd like to see it!" cried Molly Martin.

"And I!" "Me, too!" "Show it to us, Dolly, we all want a look at it once more," suggested Father John, echoing the other's requests.

"Very well. Have you brought the key to the desk, Jim?"

"Sure. I want to get into it, anyway, to get some papers Mr. Winters asked me to send him. Owen, where's the lamp? Let's light it and go do it now. Then you and I, Monty Stark, must be heading for Newburgh town. I must get back before it's very late."

"But you'll stop for supper, lads, please," begged

the host, rising upon his crutches and tucking Dorothy's hand within his arm.

"Supper! I don't feel as if I'd ever want anything to eat again, sir, though thank you all the same."

"Me either," said Jim, inelegantly, and leading the way with the lamp in hand. It had just occurred to him that he had already overstayed his permission and that the minister would be worried about his horse.

The desk was opened, the brown bag passed from hand to hand, only Dorothy declining to touch it. She had a queer feeling about it, as if it were sacred, and hid the secrets of Peter's clouded life.

But neither of the Mollies felt thus about it. They were simply curious to see what the demented lad had considered "treasures;" and as it was a harmless notion, Father John advised:

"Certainly, my daughter, let's see what is inside. I remember that you wouldn't open it before, when we placed it in the desk, yet after all it's right you should find out now. There might be something of importance — who can tell?"

"All right then, father, but you or mother do it. I don't want to pry into secrets. I promised not to 'poke' and somehow — Well, well, let mother if you don't care to."

So with all heads, save Dorothy's and Father John's, craning above the wide-topped desk, Mother Martha unfastened the worn small satchel and displayed its contents. She was fully as curious as any of the

young folks there; and though her own daintiness shrank from touch of the articles, she yet did draw them forth, one by one.

That red hair-ribbon of Dorothy's, which had been lost and not found. A painted shell picked from the dust-heap at the towers. Some bits of colored glass, through which Peter had loved to look upon a transformed landscape, marvelling in his bewildered mind why one bit should make the green trees turn a brilliant blue, and another change all to glowing scarlet. There were a few pieces of money tied in a cloth. Peter's beloved knife. A toy watch that he had obtained somewhere and had spent endless hours in trying to make "go." And down in the very bottom a cloth-enwrapped something which felt like a big, bulky envelope.

Suddenly Martha turned pale and trembled, her hand still poised above that parcel and a light of keen reflection in her eyes.

Like a flash she was remembering many things. How Peter Piper, the "Mountain Haunt," had dwelt in the old house alone, wherever and for as long as his fancy held him. She had come across traces of his occupation in every room of the cottage, even in that one where was the secret chimney cupboard. Perhaps, that had been a hiding place for him, too, as she had made it hers. Perhaps —

"Why, Martha, wife, what's the matter? Why do you look so strange? What's that last parcel that you should hesitate to touch it?" demanded her hus-

band, anxiously, while all the others fixed a curious gaze upon her.

"Open it, John. You do it. I think — I'm sure — Unwrap the cloth and see —"

He had already done so and now his own hand trembled, though a look of joy and satisfaction sprang to his face.

"Mrs. Calvert's missing document! The lost letter that we've spent hours and hours searching to find. That I've felt so guilty over losing and that Seth Winters said 'Must be found! Nothing can replace its loss!' He said it so sternly that he made me feel like a thief, and after all I wasn't to blame — I wasn't to blame! O, Peter, lad, if you had only known the trouble you would make!"

Down sat the little woman and now that her long anxiety was past allowed herself the relief of a few nervous tears.

Meanwhile, nobody forbidding, the unwrapped envelope passed from hand to hand, its written directions: "Not to be opened until after my death, unless otherwise advised," causing wonder and speculation among them all.

Jim Barlow remembered it well and his conveyance of it to the cottage. Also did Alfaretta remember it; though neither of these two had ever heard of its loss. Dorothy did not remember it, though she was of all there present, the most profoundly interested in its unknown contents.

For there within that sealed envelope was hidden

the mystery of her own parentage; the facts which Molly and she had said they would make the object of their lives to discover, until wiser and more patient thoughts had come to the young foundling, making her seek to put aside all thoughts of past or future and to live only in the present.

But even those to whom it had been entrusted could not guess at its importance. They were merely most thankful for its strange restoration and, said Father John:

"We'll run no more risk with other person's property, my Martha. The bag can stay in this desk where we placed it, with its other contents undisturbed till Seth comes home and does with them whatever Dolly wishes. But this letter we'll take to Newburgh the first thing on Monday morning, when we carry our girls back to school, and store it in a safe deposit box. Whether it is of great consequence or not — as the farrier seemed to believe — it shall be made safe, safe."

Nor could he nor Dorothy guess, at that moment when she fancied he was unduly anxious, how far beyond price would Peter Piper's legacy yet prove to her.

When the document was placed in the very innermost and safest of Father John's pockets, and the momentary excitement had subsided, Mother Martha suddenly remembered the hour and place. Rising she bade the Martins good night and to make haste lest their people should be anxious, and shaking hands

with Owen Bryan, watched to see that Jim had once more locked the farrier's desk and carefully extinguished the lamp.

Then they all passed out into the night, where a young moon was rising, and where with a laugh and shout the Smith boys declared:

"You've got to ride home, Mrs. and Mr. Even if our own 'bob' is down in the village, we've hunted up an old pung out under the shed and we youngsters will make horses of ourselves to draw it and to give you the ride of your lives. I've got a rope long enough for all of us to take hold, and — all aboard! Look out for the cars when the bell rings! Good night, Martins! More coasting next week, likely. Good night, good night, GOOD NIGHT to the jolliest day we ever had!"

Whereupon Jim appeared with Portia and the cutter, and bundling the three girls into that, next caught up the farm mistress and swung her into the old pung beside her husband. Then the homeward run began. The little maids piped up one tune after another, their joyous voices ringing clear and sweet on the frosty air, and the lads ahead joining in the choruses with as much lustiness as their running would permit.

So they came once more to the pretty cottage, and fresh good nights were said, the pair from the hill-city speeding promptly thither, and the other young folks as promptly seeking their warm beds and sleep.

But over their hearthfire the elders sat long and

thoughtfully. To grown-ups there is always sadness even in temporary partings. They talked late of what had happened, of their darling Dorothy's unknown future, and the fact that by another week's end a far different household would sit by this same fire and other young creatures fill the house with mirth and music.

At the last said Father John quite firmly, despite the little catch in his voice:

"'Whatever is, is right.' We have had our darling for a time, but her 'schooling' has but just begun and she must go on with it away from us. Yet I can trust her. Always will she seek to be true and noble although she will blunder in her trying. Wherever she goes she will win love because she will bestow her own love so lavishly. Come, let us go. I feel as if our year, our real life, on the mountain ends to-night. The few days that remain will be of bustle, packing, and farewells, and what is beyond them I would not even guess. It has been a glad, a most successful day and a glorious night has dropped its curtain over it. Come."

So they, too, sought their rest, happy and content, although as he had said, they "could not even guess" what the future held in store for them. But time would tell that story; and so will we in the second volume of the series, Dorothy's Travels. For the present, however, we, also, must say

Good night.

THE END